

(Left) Residents Exposing Brick Wall in Loft, Broome Street, SoHo, New York City, circa 1970.  
Photo Dorothy Koppelman, SoHo Memory Project.  
(Right) Bill Tarr, Door, Galvanized Steel, late 1960s, 102 Greene Street, SoHo, New York City.  
Photo by Author, 2012.

# SoHo: Beyond Boutiques and Cast Iron

## The Significance, Legacy, and Preservation of the Pioneering Artist Community's Cultural Heritage

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Susie Ranney

2012 Historic Preservation Masters Thesis, Columbia University

Advisor: Paul Bentel

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# Thesis Abstract

Fifty years ago, though the buildings stood, “SoHo” did not yet exist in name or concept. Instead, the area referred to by some as “Hell’s Hundred Acres” was considered to be a dying, industrial relic filled with unappealing buildings. Today, though built landscape of SoHo has largely remained the same, SoHo is synonymous with success, affluence, and upscale retail and loft real estate. Even those with prior familiarity with the past fifty years of history in SoHo must actively search for clues to this shift when walking the streets of SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District in the present day. For the historic preservation field, SoHo stands as one of the pivotal successes in securing the perpetual protection and regulation of a significant historic landscape and proving the value of preservation to the city and broader culture. Yet standing in the midst of this Landmark Historic District, there is little to remind us of the particular community that directly contributed to the survival of the district.

The intent of this thesis is to use a critical study of the span of preservation intervention in the SoHo district of Manhattan to inspire the responsible stewardship of the early artist community’s cultural heritage in the public memory and the physical environment of SoHo. This thesis also raises awareness that SoHo embodies concerns beyond its district boundaries: the belittling of the early artists’ SoHo provides but one example of a community whose cultural and physical heritage has been overlooked due to factors (often) beyond its control and calls attention to the particular vulnerability of artist communities to fall victim to such neglect (typically in the very landscapes that they helped to revive). While much of the physical landscape of the early artists has indeed been irrevocably deprived of its authentic character, preservation of the community’s memory and cultural heritage is not a lost cause. The thesis concludes with suggestions for interventions within the current preservation frameworks as well as how the preservation system might be improved to better accommodate historic artifacts with multiple layers and types of significance, a critical consideration as both the heritage artifacts and their designations mature.

# Introduction



(Left) Figure 1. Entrance to 112 Greene Street, SoHo, New York City, circa 1970.  
Uncredited Photo, Daviddeitcher.com.

(Right) Figure 2. Entrance to 112 Greene Street, SoHo, New York City.  
Photo by Author, 2012.

Fifty years ago, though the buildings stood, “SoHo” did not yet exist in name or concept. Instead, the area referred to by some as “Hell’s Hundred Acres” was considered to be a dying, industrial relic filled with unappealing buildings. Today, though built landscape of SoHo has largely remained the same, SoHo is synonymous with success, affluence, and upscale retail and loft real estate. What prompted so swift and pervasive a change in the political intentions and popular perceptions associated with the district? Even for those with prior familiarity with the past fifty years of history in SoHo, one must actively search for clues to this shift when walking the streets of SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District in the present day.

Through the adaptive use of SoHo’s historic loft buildings, a group of enterprising, subversive urban artists in the 1960s and early 1970s inspired the modern era’s obsession with historic industrial buildings. The unprecedented scale of the regeneration of the depressed SoHo landscape into one of New York City’s most fashionable and sought-after districts stimulated similar frenzies around the country particularly in increasingly vacant, post-industrial sectors. This phenomenon, known as the “SoHo Effect,” indicates a widespread cultural shift in urban planning, aesthetics, and culture, as buildings marginalized at the beginning of the 1960s became the epitome of urban living by the mid-1970s.

For the historic preservation field, SoHo stands as one of the pivotal successes in securing the perpetual protection and regulation of a significant historic landscape and proving the value of preservation to the city and broader culture. However, the deliverance of this condemned assemblage of historic buildings did not evolve at the hands of city planners or professional preservationists. Without the early

SoHo artists' community, SoHo as a historic district or even a landscape at all would likely not exist. Yet standing in the midst of this Landmark Historic District, there is little to remind us of the particular community that directly contributed to the survival of the district. Why then has the historic preservation field expended so little energy in the memorialization of the physical and cultural heritage of this people group and era? What is the nature of the preservation system at hand that has enabled such a fleeting treatment of the cultural group that has contributed so greatly to the popularity of the preservation field itself as well as other arenas?

Among the first municipal governments to adopt a regulatory preservation system, when the New York City government organized its Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1965, aesthetic and physical manifestations of history provided the legal foundations for its preservation argument.<sup>1</sup> Adherence to the value of bricks and mortar in contributing to the economic and cultural vitality of the city thus reinforced a preservation ideology that defined cultural heritage in terms of tangible manifestations of history and culture. However, concerns within the historic preservation field have since expanded beyond the physical representation of the distant and often monumental past. And while many preservation groups have incorporated both aesthetic and intangible considerations into evaluation criteria and policy, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission has held to traditional policies of tangible heritage rooted in static significance.

Assessment of the fifty-year arc of preservation efforts in SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District reveals a number of issues germane to any discussion of the efficacy of present-day historic preservation practice within and beyond the district boundaries of SoHo. Central to these is the presence of multiple layers of significance, a condition particularly prevalent in urban landscapes. The salvation of SoHo's nineteenth-century fabric stands as one of the great early successes for the historic preservation field, but the staunch adherence to formal integrity representative of a fixed point within the historical narrative has put preservation at odds with itself by enabling (even facilitating) the near erasure of the other layers of significance that one has or may yet apply to the heritage of the area. While the facades of the cast iron buildings remain, the vibrant culture that took place behind and in front of them has largely departed along with the community that gave rise to the lifestyle. Such a void in the historic timeline not only detracts

<sup>1</sup> New York City Administrative Code, "Chapter 3-25-301: Purpose and Declaration of Public Policy," Municipal Government, the City of New York.

from the demonstrable importance of artist community in SoHo but also creates an inherent disconnect that reduces SoHo's industrial history and the artists' adaptation of it to an applied style. In order for the preservation field to truly fulfill its self-appointed mandate to enrich the present and future via the retention of fabric and memory, the cumulative nature of significance and the variety of manifestations by which culture can be expressed must be incorporated into preservation policy.

Using the historic treatment of the artist community and SoHo by the preservation field as a case study, the purpose of this report is first to explain the demonstrable but neglected significance of the pioneering SoHo artist community and second to assess the role historic preservation can and should play in the formation and retention of public memory. The main body of the report spans three sections:

- 1) "Synopsis of Significance" investigates the major impacts of the artist residents in the fields of urban history and planning, aesthetics and art history, and culture.
- 2) "The Artists' SoHo" examines the historic SoHo landscape in which the artists participated in order to identify not only the tangible and intangible manifestations of this distinct and definable community but also to determine how the landscape itself directly contributed to the development of their aesthetics and culture.
- 3) "Evaluation of Preservation in SoHo" examines the artist community's involvement across the arc of preservation intervention in the district. The section concludes with suggestions for intervention within the current preservation system as well as how the system itself might be made more effective in adequately addressing the cultural heritage of the SoHo artists and others.

The reader should anticipate overlap within and between the major sections; this is to be expected given the degree to which the stories of the artist community and preservation are interwoven within the modern history of SoHo.

# Chapter 1: Synopsis of Significance

Currently, the designation reports of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District on both the national and local levels attributes the significance of the SoHo district to the cast-iron architecture of the late nineteenth century and relegates the artist community to the role of bit player. As a self-identifying, cohesive, authoritative, and participatory group acknowledged by other cohesive urban groups, the artist community deserves to be recognized as a legitimate group with demonstrable relevancy, which this report will serve to elucidate. The introductory “General Background” section provides certain historic context for the conditions of the artists’ residency in SoHo in the 1960s through an overview of the larger artist community in the city. The remainder of the chapter discusses the variety of influences of the early SoHo artist community in local and general urban history through the lens of significance in urban, aesthetic, and cultural history.

“Urban Historical Significance” discusses the SoHo artist community’s unparalleled influence on the history of urban planning, even to the extent of garnering a legitimately recognized namesake phenomenon. “Aesthetic Significance” looks at the artists and the supporting community’s adaptation and proliferation of their own identifiable aesthetic that profoundly effected art and the art market of the time. This thesis is not intended to serve as an art historical study of 1960s contemporary urban art and furthermore acknowledges the degree of diversity of expression and ideology amongst the SoHo artists. Still, general patterns do arise in the artists’ work and processes that implicate a certain set of shared sensibilities that illuminate the artists’ corresponding cultural impact. “Cultural Significance” concludes the chapter with an examination of the artist community’s impact on popular culture as realized through the proliferation of the “loft lifestyle,” the reconceptualization of the urban living experience for the middle class, and the influence of the artists’ activities in SoHo on nascent municipal historic preservation practice.

## General Background

During World War II, industrial production began to decline in urban areas as a result of the Great Depression, war, and advances in technology and mass-production.<sup>1</sup> As industrial, manufacturing, and commercial businesses (hereafter referred to as “industry”) turned their attentions outside of the city core, urban artists began to infiltrate the newly vacated spaces, though these spaces were typically located in “M” districts, the significance of which will be explained momentarily. The rapidly apparent obsolescence of buildings considered “cutting edge” a few decades prior vexed local landlords and city planners. However, the abandoned lofts attracted artist-residents as inexpensive, relatively spacious urban spaces in which they could experiment with relative freedom, provided the building inspector did not expose the illegal occupation. Not all artists chose to live and work in the early loft spaces, which were typically much smaller in size than the average SoHo lofts.<sup>2</sup> As the area of Lower Manhattan that would become the Artists’ SoHo fell into industrial disuse in the 1950s and 1960s, a small number of urban artists moved into the unused spaces and inadvertently began the legendary regeneration of the “dying” industrial district.

Participants in the fine arts have long been drawn to residual spaces of urban environments. Those choosing to live *la boheme* a lifestyle often consciously chose to reside in such areas for a variety of reasons: physical separation, mental separation, lifestyle experimentation and investigation, economics, inspiration. Braving difficult living conditions, artists in search of inexpensive space “pioneer” settlements in areas not regarded as acceptable by middle and upper middle class urban residents. Occupation of spaces under-valued or maligned by the authorities and larger society has repeatedly left artists vulnerable to the threat of displacement as the city or real estate community deems the area attractive for civically or economically beneficial uses.

Inner-city artists found themselves increasingly at odds with the New York City’s municipal building codes either through renewal-related displacement, evictions related to city district rezonings, and a general shortage of zoning-approved units that could accommodate the artists’ works and lifestyle. In 1961, as public and private entities literally erased and rebuilt certain areas of the cityscape, the City

<sup>1</sup> Chester Rapkin, *The South Houston Industrial Area; A Study of the Economic Significance of Firms, the Physical Quality of Buildings, and the Real Estate Market in an Old Loft Section of Lower Manhattan* (Prepared for City Planning Commission—Department of City Planning, the City of New York. 1963), 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> James R. Rosenquist, *Painting Below Zero: Notes on a Life in Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 84.



Planning Commission of New York revised its nearly half-century old Zoning Ordinance in the attempt to control new development. The New York City Zoning Code organized the city through the allocation of three land-use categories, each of which were in turn formally ordered through stipulations on acceptable bulk, density, and floor-area ratio.<sup>3</sup> The land-use categories proscribed the nature of activities carried out in each district: “R” districts permitted residential and community uses only; “C” districts permitted commercial, residential, and community uses; “M” districts permitted manufacturing, warehouse, and commercial uses but forbade the presence of residential and community facilities due to the health-harming effects of living near industrial uses. Though the 1961 revisions did not substantially alter the land-use principles of the 1916 code, city planners were in effect ratifying their adherence to such use-separated planning principles.

In the decade following the city’s recommitment to land-use planning policy, the Artists Tenant Association (ATA) and later the SoHo Artists Association (SAA) worked to end the cycle of artist displacement and ensure that the artist community would be able to continue to work and live within the city. The ATA, an informal organization of city-based artist-residents active from 1959-1976, recognized that city planners’ recommitment to use-based zoning and the district rezonings taking place would only serve to perpetuate artists’ struggle to secure adequate studio space. Fearing a reprise of the current and previous decades’ redevelopments of urban artist habitats, the ATA, with the support of other artist-housing organizations, appealed to Mayor Robert Wagner, whose brother was in fact an artist.<sup>4</sup>

Indicative of the importance attributed to the artist class in post-war New York City, the ATA convinced Mayor Wagner to provide a zoning variance that would accommodate the “special needs” of artists: in August 1961, Mayor Wagner established the first Artist in Residence program through Executive Order. This initial attempt at solving the housing problem proved largely unsuccessful and only served to increase the apprehension of many artists, who now risked eviction if they did not pass the certification process. In response to 1963 rezonings that resulted in or had the potential to cause eviction of artists, the ATA threatened a citywide artists’ strike. Mayor Wagner quickly placed a moratorium on

3 In the landmark class of Village of Euclid, OH vs. Ambler Realty Co. (272 U.S. 365 (1926)), the US Supreme Court found that the government had a valid interest in maintaining and, if necessary, regulating the character of a neighborhood in the interest of public health, safety, and welfare.

4 Areas of Greenwich Village, an artist-bohemia center first decades of the twentieth century, fell victim to the same urban renewal forces that assaulted the East Riverfront enclave of Coenties Slip. The Slip, itself a haven for artists breaking away from the mainstream, suffered its own “raze and raise” fate in the early 1960s, though SoHo benefited through the relocation of several Slip artists to the inner-islands larger lofts. (Jim Stratton, *Pioneering in the Urban Wilderness* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 24.)

evictions, and in 1964, the New York State legislature amended the Multiple Dwelling Law with Article 7-B, which codified the Artist in Residence law.<sup>5</sup> The AIR program enabled artists certified by the Department of Buildings to reside and work in former commercial and manufacturing buildings or districts. Stringent fire codes and limitations on number of artist residents within the same building were also enacted, but most importantly for the SoHo artists, artists and active manufacturing businesses were not allowed to occupy the same structure. However, SoHo artists largely ignored the law and developed their own mixed-use district, of which the city was fully aware but turned a mostly blind eye towards, as the artists were still relatively low in number and major developers were not yet involved.<sup>6</sup>

## Urban Historical Significance

While artists have long enjoyed a certain level of societal influence and even reverence, the SoHo artist community demonstrated a new kind of power to be wielded by the creative class on modern urban planning through the establishment of a phenomenon since termed the “SoHo Effect.” The artist community’s reinvention of SoHo stands as among the first, if not the first, comprehensive repurposings of an entire industrial district to residential use without demolition of the fabric. The Artists’ SoHo and the “SoHo Effect” quickly altered the approaches of city planners, real estate developers, and the public in assessing the potential of post-industrial areas of cities. Prior to the success of the Artists’ SoHo, public and private redevelopment projects of maligned or “blighted” city fabric often resulted in the forced displacement of artists. Following the successful reinvention of the SoHo district by the artist community and in light of the weight of the creative class in society, city planners began to support and encourage the presence of artists in a previously depressed districts in hopes of duplicating the “rediscovery” of SoHo. Typical of the SoHo Effect, the resulting interest by the rent-paying or home-owning community at large raises prices beyond the artists’ means; once again displaced, the artists became, in a sense, victims of their own urban influence. In a society still very much focused on the creative class, city planners tend to conceive of this redevelopment as an exciting and proven method for revitalizing neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Stratton, *Pioneering in the Urban Wilderness*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Petrus, “From Gritty to Chic: The Transformation of New York City’s SoHo, 1962-1976,” *New York History* (Winter 2003), p. 14. Accessed 2 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.sohoalliance.org/archives.html>>

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the utilization of artist communities as economic generators in the present day, please see Jeffrey Spivak, “The Artist Dividend,” *Urban Land* (July 2007), pp. 95-98



Figure 3. Lower Manhattan Expressway Path, New York City. Google Maps, Flickr, vanshnookenraggen. Accessed 12 May 2012.

The SoHo artist community first caught popular interest through the prominent public role of the artists in the effort to overturn the LOMEX redevelopment proposal.<sup>8</sup> The SoHo artist community collaborated with Jane Jacobs and Margot Gayle in both the public fight and the behind-the-scenes strategizing and preparations. A definitive voice in community-based urban theory, Jacobs became involved in the advocacy effort the very year that the proposal reemerged and worked alongside the elected representatives of the Second Assembly District (the area that would be most effected) in taking the protest directly to the city authorities. The Jacobs-led opposition concentrated on the argument that the “City was needlessly going to uproot an entire community which was predominantly Italian” and that had cultural and historical significance in New York City’s development.<sup>9</sup> Jacobs also challenged the standard use-based zoning principles by arguing that healthy urban districts and economies arose from and were sustained by an organic, locally-determined mixture of uses. While Jacobs focused on the people of Little Italy, Margot Gayle led a powerful advocacy campaign working to demonstrate the architectural importance of SoHo’s physical structures. Later founder of Friends of Cast Iron Architecture and one of the

8 Proposed by Robert Moses in 1941 and 1949, LOMEX, or the Lower Manhattan (or Canal Street) Expressway, proposed to build a ten-lane elevated highway from the East River to the Hudson River in order to connect the Holland Tunnell to the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges. Doing so would have necessitated the demolition of both SoHo and Little Italy (in parts).

9 Robert J. Conrad, “Community Response to Urban Highway Proposals and its Effect on City Planning: a Study of the Lower Manhattan Expressway,” (Master Thesis, Columbia University, 1966), 33.

three founders Victorian Society in America, Margot gathered support from friends such as academian James Marston Fitch and major architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable.<sup>10</sup> Though failed, his first attempt at designation for the district as an area of architectural importance came within the first year of the founding of the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The third component of the anti-LOMEX campaign, the SoHo artist community utilized the breadth of their collective appeal and individual expressive aptitude to raise support. As Jacobs and Gayle focused on academic planning and architectural history defenses, the artists and their families broadened the relevancy of the survival of SoHo to the larger city population. Dancer and wife of artist Donald Judd, Julie Finch chaired Artists Against the Expressway (AAE), an independent, SoHo-based committee that boasted a membership of highly influential and respected figures in both the art world (Barnett Newman) and academia (James Marston Fitch). Finch organized letter-writing campaigns to residents' influential friends in the city government and beyond. The primary effort focused on expressing the value of the neighborhood's buildings to the artist population, and the value of the artist population to the New York City. Aware of New York society's trepidation that the city might slip from its status as a prestigious center of national and international art production, the AAE contended that the SoHo lofts provided the most suitable studio space remaining in the city and their loss would likely result in the loss of New York City artists. The public forum held by the AAE on June 19, 1969, at the nearby Whitney Museum proved to be a turning point in the fight to defeat LOMEX.<sup>11</sup> During the course of the evening, the audience, filled with 250 artists, friends, advocates, and community leaders, heard from a dozen well-known speakers such as artist Barnett Newman, art dealer Robert Feigen, and architectural historian and preservationist Fitch on behalf of the artist communities residence in SoHo.<sup>12</sup>

Though the ideas presented at the June 1969 meeting were hardly new to those in attendance, the covering of the event by *The New York Times* brought the discussion to the attentions of national public. The combination of the clout of the speakers, audience, and venue, the particular New York reverence for arts and artists, and the Vietnam era sensitivity to political controversy, all proliferated at to a na-

10 "Friends of Cast Iron Architecture," New York Preservation Archive Project, Accessed 7 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.nypap.org/category/tags/friends-cast-iron-architecture>>

11 Interestingly, the AAE had reached out to MoMA, but the threat of potential unrest with the city resulted in the denial of permission for the group to use the MoMA facilities. At that time, MoMA was in the midst of preparing to apply for zoning variance to accommodate a "complicated building program." Likely, the museum did not want to be associated with the rabble-rousers in SoHo.  
(Grace Glueck, "Artists Assail Downtown Expressway," *The New York Times* (20 Jun. 1969), Proquest Historical Newspapers, Accessed 2 Mar. 2012.)

12 Glueck, "Artists Assail Downtown Expressway."

tional audience, made the evening a resounding success. Advocacy journalism dispersed the messages of Jacobs, Gayle, and the artist-residents, who received especially wide media publicity for the successful recycling of the buildings. The media, an important tool in developing public interest in the SoHo situation, portrayed the artists and advocates as “saving humanity by struggling against the government,” a *cause celebre* relevant in the years of anti-Vietnam War sentiment.<sup>13</sup> Strong support from *The New York Times*, *New York Post*, and *Village Voice* promoted the artists’ activities as the moral pursuit to save not only an urban area but also humanity itself by “struggling heroically against government bureaucracies and corporate wealth.”<sup>14</sup> Soon after the evening meeting at the Whitney, LOMEX began to fail. Later, a city planning commissioner admitted, “The expressway was a certainty until the artists stepped in.”<sup>15</sup>

The artist community’s next battle was for the legalization of their occupation in SoHo through a zoning code variance. Though the ATA was able to secure an exception for urban artists to both live and work in spaces without permanent residential certificates of occupancy, the law was void in SoHo because of still-active industry. While the majority of SoHo residents supported the anti-LOMEX campaign, opinion on the necessity of legalizing occupancy was a bit more divided.



Figure 4. Artist In Residence Sign, New York City.  
SoHo Memory Project (22 Oct. 2011).

Part of the reason for the uncertainty lay in the carrying out of the certification process: one had to conform to a particular set of qualifying criteria in order to be declared a legal “Artist in Residence.” Such a process meant that a well-known, successful writer would be denied approval regardless of how

<sup>13</sup> James R. Hudson, *The Unanticipated City: Loft Conversions in Lower Manhattan* (Cambridge, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 65.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 65, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Stratton, *Pioneering in the Urban Wilderness*, 33.

long he or she had been in the community. Furthermore, the code was inconsistently enforced, so many preferred to remain illegal simply to avoid the hassle, even after the law was amended to permit artist residency in SoHo.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of the overturning of LOMEX, public exposure of both the SoHo artists' "secret" residency and the city's toleration of the illegal activity, and growing presence of speculative developers beginning to convert the post-industrial structures, the city determined that the legalization and regulation of the occupancy was necessary in order to protect its own authority. In the 1969 Master Plan for New York City, members of the City Planning Commission acknowledged the important local contributions "blue-collar jobs," but concluded, "Inevitably, white-collar activities and housing are going to supplant manufacturing in [South Houston]."<sup>17</sup> Setting the precedence for numerous district revitalizations and conversions since, the city let the artist community begin the process of transforming the depressed neighborhood into a vibrant contributor to the city's economic and residential markets. Repudiating the principles they had ratified merely ten years prior, the City Planning Commission validated the presence of mixed-use neighborhood by allowing the artists to gain permanent occupation in the manufacturing district.<sup>18</sup> Not until 1971 were the zoning laws amended and with the result that SoHo became the first mixed-use zone for artist housing. The larger lofts were reserved for the manufacturing businesses, and residency had to be approved by the Artist Certification Committee of the Department of Cultural Affairs. With SoHo as the testing grounds, the same artist-and-light manufacturing mixed-used zoning system was instigated in neighboring NoHo and TriBeCa (to the north and south of SoHo) in the later years of the decade.<sup>19</sup>

16 Richard Kostelanetz, *SoHo: the Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 17.

17 New York City Planning Commission, *Plan for New York City: A Proposal, Vol.1: Critical Issues*, 67-72; "Loft Building in City Given Special Mention," NYT, 3 Feb. 1969.

18 For greater discussion of the full range of CPC motives and concerns regarding allowing artist residency, please refer to Petrus, "From Gritty to Chic," 18-21.

19 Shirley Hackel, "Another Look at SoHo's A-I-R Requirements, Part 2," Warburg Realty. Accessed 10 May 2012. <<http://www.warburgrealty.com/blog/?p=650>>

## Aesthetic Significance

The majority of the artists that looked to SoHo lofts as a solution to their residency and work problems were culled from those seeking a break from the “high style” schools of Abstract Expressionism and the 14th Street “club.” The work of Marcel Duchamp, David Smith, and Allan Kaprow earlier in the twentieth century paved the way for artists to look to the everyday world for inspiration and source material. During the 1950s and 1960s, artists of the Pop Art and Junk Culture movements observed the common reality of daily experience in order to reproduce that world in a new, thought-provoking manner at once familiar but also startling.<sup>20</sup> In their Coenties Slip loft-studios, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and James Rosenquist looked to the historicity of their surroundings and the fragmentation of the cityscape to reveal both the beauty and the irony of reality.<sup>21</sup> Many artists moved away from explicitly figural references, though they continued to derive source and physical material from their environs.

The blurring of the boundary between artwork, material source, production setting, and presentation setting culminated in the merging of context and content, a defining feature of 1960s and 1970s contemporary art and one of the ways that artists fostered the public aesthetic appreciation for the industrial spaces of SoHo. James Rosenquist understood how works assumed meaning through context and juxtaposition:

Monet set his canvases around the room and looked at them in order to get the right kind of color saturation in his eyes. All of this color was streaming into his eyes so whatever he looked at was inflected by peripheral vision.<sup>22</sup>

While the influence of context on the reading of art object might appear an obvious observation to the present-day audience, this concept became foundational to many movements of mid-century art. The power of setting fundamentally altered the way art was and has since been conceived, produced, and displayed by artists as well as the audience’s reception of artworks.<sup>23</sup>

20 Claus Oldenburg set up an iteration of his living piece *The Store* (1960) at the window of his street-level studio on East 2nd Street. There he “sold” everyday objects as art, thereby bringing art to the people and elevating the everyday to art.

(Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration Between Science, Technology, and Art* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 38.)

21 Coenties Slip “had been ‘the broadest and busiest of the slips.... New Amsterdam’s Governor Kieft built the first City Tavern in 1641, later to become New York’s first City Hall. Demolished in 1790, it is marked by a plaque at 73 Pearl Street.’ Coenties Slip, the historical significance of which was known by few, had fallen victim to urban renewal in the same decade as SoHo’s struggle, and the destruction of it and other communities inspired sensitivity to the physical reminders of the past.

(Michael Lobel, *James Rosenquist: Pop Art, Politics, and History in the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 51.)

22 Rosenquist, *Painting Below Zero*, 155.

23 Ibid, 155.

The development of the understanding of art exhibition as a comprehensive tableau had a direct impact on the cultural and aesthetic perception of SoHo's maturing manufacturing landscape. Many artists (particularly in SoHo) grew increasingly cognizant of the impact of periphery and setting on the experience, reception, and interpretation of their art.<sup>24</sup> Art—whether inanimate or living—and context were understood to be involved in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship, with providing a means to reinforce and articulate the environment, thus qualifying “what otherwise risked remaining characterless.”<sup>25</sup> Donald Judd considered the entire environment to be of fundamental importance to the perception of an art- or architecture-object. Codifying this concept in his tenets of architecture, Judd declared, “Within the capacity of one person or of a small group, the relationship of all visible things should be considered.... All visible things are important.”<sup>26</sup> In so doing, the presence of the artists and connection between the art, artist, and environment helped to publically validate and give value to the SoHo environment and structures even for those who had not previously responded positively to the history or architectural aesthetics.

SoHo artists like Judd, Gordon Matta-Clark, and James Rosenquist expanded this concept of contextual significance to an understanding that the art experience was one rooted in empiricism and personal experience. These artists offered no “correct” interpretations to their work because individual reception could be drastically altered due to simple changes in approach and context. As a result, Judd sought rooms with sufficient space to permit artworks to coexist but not fight for attention or to project onto each other.<sup>27</sup> And while other factors of course factored into the artists' decisions to reside, work, and exhibit in SoHo, site selection was critical for the artists adhering to philosophies of empiricism and phenomenology. This group of artists consequently developed a high degree of sensitivity to the concrete and abstract qualities of SoHo's physical environment.

24 Highly influential for mid-century artists, Allan Kaprow developed the Environments and Happenings movements in the 1940s. For more information on Kaprow's work and thought process, please see William Kaizen, “Framed Space: Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting,” *Grey Room*, no. 13 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 80-107.

25 David Raskin, *Donald Judd* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 46.

26 Donald Judd, “Art and Architecture,” In Marianne Stockbrand, *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd* (Marfa, TX: Chinati Foundation; New Haven, CT: in association with Yale University Press, 2010), 284.

27 Stockbrand, *Chinati*, 18



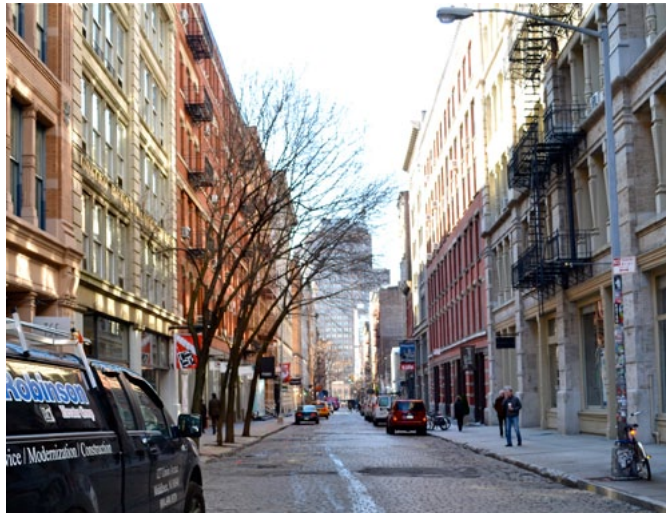


Figure 5. Wooster Street, SoHo, New York City. Photo by Author, 2012.

Judd felt that proportion in physical space had the power to “stop the heart... A street or building will transfix a person.”<sup>28</sup> He further contended that “good” architecture resulted from the achievement of proportion and balance through structural, scalar, and material harmony, qualities that he recognized in the “functional” buildings of SoHo. Judd explored such conditions as the interaction of verticals and horizontals in his stacked boxes series (1967), which “established a direct connection between the sculpture, the viewer and the space in which both stand. The viewer reads the sculpture by scanning the relationship between the parts of the sculpture and the dimensions of the room.”<sup>29</sup> Such rootedness in the context reinforced the mutual projection of value from art to setting to art and further validated the district and the aesthetics in the eyes of the public.

The patrons and gallerists of the elite uptown art market viewed these avant-garde artists as “terrible children,” and the art simply looked out of place within (or did not even fit into) the smaller boutique galleries uptown.<sup>30</sup> These “jewel box” galleries and museums did not suffice as appropriate environments to display art, that was by its very nature so fundamentally, purposely, and critically different from the art typical of the uptown arena. George Maciunas even attempted to bring this art to the uptown art scene when he opened AG Gallery on Madison Avenue with friend Almus Salcius in 1961. Maciunas intended to use the gallery to introduce FLUXUS art, a movement he founded, to the mainstream market.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Stockbrand, *Chinati*, 267.

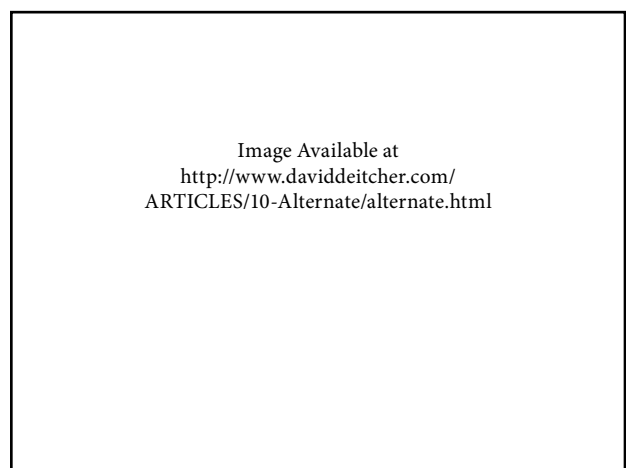
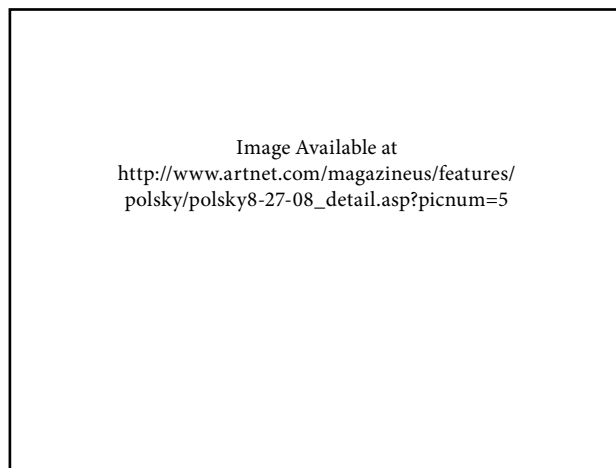
<sup>29</sup> Donald Judd: *Architektur*, Peter Noever ed. (Ostfildem-Ruit: Hatje Cantz; Postchester: Art Books International, 2003), 99, 107.

<sup>30</sup> Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Roslyn Bernstein, Shael Shapiro, and Jonas Mekas, *Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo* (New York: Jonas Mekas Foundation, 2010), 44-45.

As he would later on do in SoHo, Maciunas enlisted friends and fellow artists for help in deconstructing the gallery into a bare, brick-walled space. Unfortunately for Maciunas, the uptown scene rejected this “lonely outpost in the art world,” and the gallery went bankrupt in the same year it opened, and Maciunas returned downtown.<sup>32</sup>

Paula Cooper began the departure of art gallerists from the “artified” uptown scene when she established the first official gallery in SoHo in 1968. Art galleries in SoHo were fundamentally different from those uptown and had radical impacts on the perception of SoHo. Physically, SoHo galleries were larger and more open than their uptown counterparts and inflected with elements of the industrial past. In both the formal galleries and the artists’ own lofts, the lack of visual obstruction and the intrinsic grit of the loft spaces denied any insistence on the adoption a formalized, hierarchical manner in the presentation of one’s lifestyle or art.



(Left) Figure 6. Exterior Paula Cooper Gallery, Wooster Street, SoHo, New York City, 1976.

Photo by Yuri.

(Right) Figure 7. View of Exhibition for the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Veitnam, Paula Cooper Gallery, SoHo, New York City, Oct. 1968.

Uncredited Photo.

Artists were seen as so intrinsically tied to their spaces that the dealers tried to recreate the spaces and the intimate encounter produced under such circumstances. In 1969, Ivan Karp left his post as co-director for major uptown dealer Leo Castelli (who opened his own SoHo gallery in 1971) and opened the

<sup>32</sup> Maciunas gave Yoko Ono her first headlining show; hers was the last exhibition of the gallery. Less than two years later, Maciunas declared in his 1963 FLUXUS Manifesto the intention to “Promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART reality to be grasped by all people, not only by critics, dilettantes, and professionals.” (Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 44-45.)

O.K. Harris Gallery (485 West Broadway, now at 383 West Broadway), the second full-fledged gallery in SoHo. Karp took cues from the artists' own spaces and produced a wholly new approach with his gallery:

I wanted it to have a very open look about it. I wanted there to be no secret zones, no exclusive areas. I wanted [a place] where we could show advanced work under wholesome auspices.<sup>33</sup>

Though the galleries made the art "sale-able" in theory, the artists were interested in promoting the legitimacy of their art and their way of life to the public beyond a formalized setting.

Following in the footsteps of the Judson Memorial Church in Washington Square South, SoHo quickly became the nexus of the alternative space movement, which arose in the second half of the 1960s as artists grew dissatisfied with the white boxes of commercial scene.<sup>34</sup> Exemplified by 112 Greene Street, known as the Workshop, the alternative space offered artists just that: an informal arena for investigation, experimentation, and self-expression that provided a completely different physical atmosphere to the pristine museum and gallery spaces of the modern movement.<sup>35</sup>

Gallery-exhibited Environments almost invariably tend to be untouchable, static display pieces in conformity with the gallery tradition. All the marvelous potentials of transformation and interactivity between art, the public, and nature are out of the question.<sup>36</sup>

Art was no longer considered ornamentation for the wall but part of a total environment that was in and of itself a work of art. By incorporating and glorifying the quotidian and unkempt, the artists overthrew the notion that artwork should be isolated from the messy circumstances of its production.<sup>37</sup>

Other artists physically explored the quirks and characteristics of the raw spaces in such a way as to literally fuse art and context while causing viewers to question their understanding of space. Gordon Matta-Clark sought to inspire a dis- and re-orientation of the viewer's perception through the manipulation of the superficial environment.

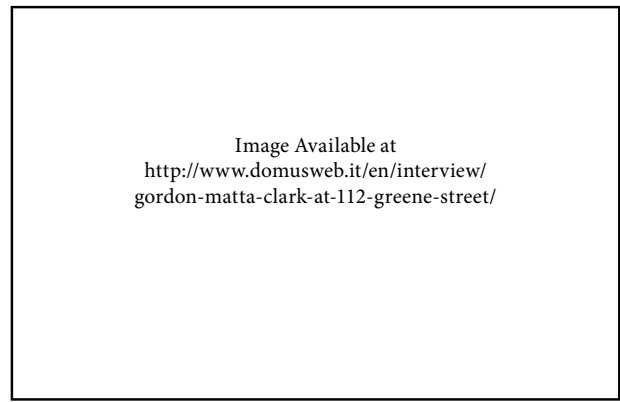
33 Oral history interview with Ivan C. Karp, 1986 Apr. 17-1988 Oct. 18, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

34 Nancy Foote, "The Apotheosis of the Crummy Space," *ArtForum* 15:2 (Oct. 1976), 29-30.

35 Ibid, 29.

36 Allan Kaprow, Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, 23.

37 George Maciunas, founder of the FLUXUS art movement, devised and dispersed the FLUXUS Manifesto in 1963, which professed a desire to "Promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART Reality to be grasped by all people, not only by critics, dilettantes and professionals." (Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 40.)



(Left) Figure 8. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Cherry Tree*, Installation at 112 Greene Street, SoHo, New York City, 1971. Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner Gallery.

(Right) Figure 9. Gordon Matta-Clark Installing *Walls Paper* at 112 Greene Street, SoHo, New York City, 1972. Photo by Cosmos Andrew Sarchiapone.

For *Walls Paper*, one of his early exhibitions/experiments at 112 Greene Street, Matta covered the walls of the ground floor with images of the interiors of other, gutted buildings and plastered an enormous image of a subway train across the airshaft that faced the gallery's rear windows. In so doing, he fundamentally altered how the audience interacted with the space, first drawing them to the rear of the building and then disorienting their experience through the imagery of the other building interiors.<sup>38</sup> Matta also utilized the power of personal memory and experience as he explored the environment through destructive means. By rendering the architecture visible only through its supporting relationship to the art, Matta redirected perspective and confused distinctions between art and setting in installations such as *Cherry Tree* (1971) and his later series of works involving the literal cutting into and extraction from the built environment:<sup>39</sup>

Matta-Clark's chain-sawed environments make meaning by intensifying physical self-consciousness to ecstatic or terrifying effect. They are symbols of a life in art conducted outside the upholstered prisons of commerce and institutions, an uncontained existence requiring moment to moment location checks: Where am I? Furthermore: What am I and what am I doing?<sup>40</sup>

Matta once commented, "Why hang things on a wall when the wall itself is so much more a challenging medium?"<sup>41</sup> By "co-opting the crumminess" of the spaces, artists eschewed beauty as the defining characteristic of art and began to believe that art could survive outside the traditional gallery.<sup>42</sup>

38 Kostelanetz, *SoHo: the Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 89.

39 Pamela M. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 68.

40 Peter Schjeldahl from Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, 116-7.

41 Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 67.

42 Foote, "The Apotheosis of the Crummy Space," 30.

Particularly for the artists involved in the alternative space movement, “Unpurchaseability signified the new purity; the non-art context became its testing ground.”<sup>43</sup> The condition of “unpurchaseability” often came from the physical inability to remove the artwork from the setting in which it was displayed. Unpurchaseability was also conceptual: the manner in which art objects were displayed and the relationship between objects or surroundings exercised definitive influence on the reading of a work. Like the artworks they created, the artists themselves became the ultimate living art objects through media. As a result, the reading of landscape of SoHo can, in a sense, be understood as incomplete without the artists’ layer of intervention.

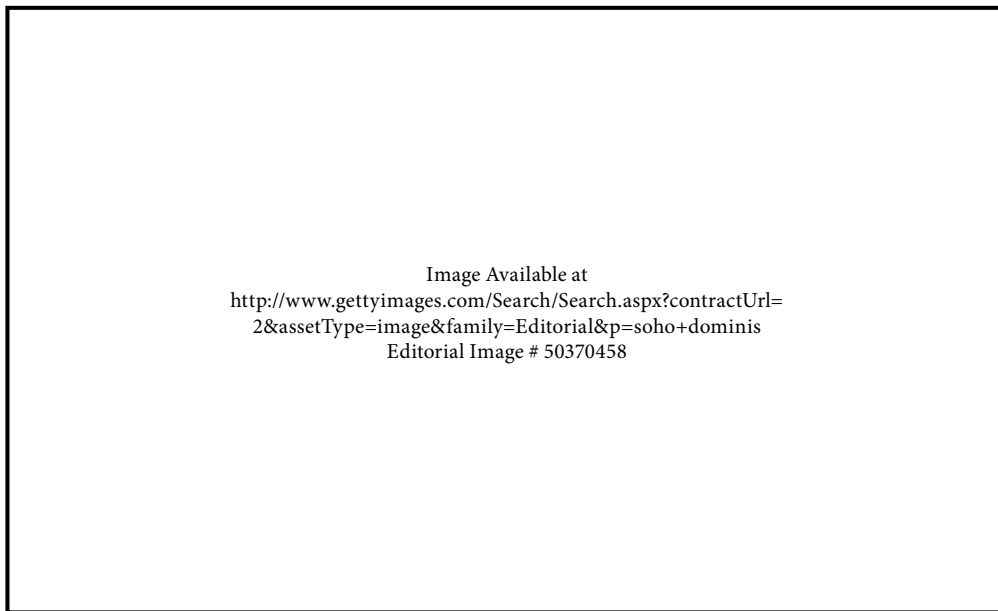


Figure 10. Painter Jack Beal and wife Sondra in SoHo Loft, New York City, 1970.  
 Photo by John Dominis, Time Life Pictures, Getty Images.

<sup>43</sup> Foote, “The Apotheosis of the Crummy Space,” 30..

## Cultural Significance

The increasing indistinguishability between artist, art, and setting led to a the public perception the lifestyle of the artists, known as “loft living,” as purchaseable and reproduceable. As a consequence, highly eclectic, “minimal,” and industrial-esque designs came to dominate the decorative and lifestyle market. However, the non-SoHo, non-artist decorators rarely procured their housewares through the same avenues as the artists or focused on the connection between object and context beyond personal preference. Although the “loft aesthetic” continues to abound throughout the SoHo district, it is simply a superficial aesthetic application and not an immersive exploration of the district’s inherent qualities.

Disseminated to the public through the design, lifestyle, and general news media, loft living “played a vital role in domesticating the industrial aesthetic, making its features and textures acceptable to a public for whom they would have had no relevance only a few decades previously.”<sup>44</sup> In 1970, *Life Magazine* published the feature “Living Big in a Loft,” discussing the SoHo artist lifestyle, which came to be known as “loft-living,” a term popularized by Sharon Zukin’s 1982 book of the same name. Such publicity introduced the national public to the SoHo culture within months of the SoHo Artists Festival, which, though also covered by local media, offered direct experience. The opening up of turn-of-the-century manufacturing centers coincided with new developments in middle class patterns of consumption and interest in the arts. In 1977, *The Village Voice* observed, “The presence of a unified avant-garde within a single neighborhood has profoundly altered the New York style, from the way we furnish our homes... to the way we envision public space. [These decisions] reflect the SoHo aesthetic—combining the minimal with the found.”<sup>45</sup> The artists consciously pursued a de-formalization of life, art, and architecture and the boundaries between them by paring down their lifestyle to essentials of their inhabited spaces and repurposing “junk” as objects for art and life.

Artist-residents largely eschewed suburban standards of compartmentalization of function and formality and left the loft interiors open in order to simultaneously accommodate domestic and work uses. As will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter, artists sought out and profited from the live-work capabilities of the lofts, and their whimsical approaches to space captured the public imagination. The proliferation of media attention and direct contact with the physical spaces via popular

<sup>44</sup> Marcus Field, *Lofts* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2001), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Hudson, *The Unanticipated City*, 60.

media and on-site events exposed the previously hidden world of the SoHo artists to the national and international publics. The visual of the artist, artwork, and loft setting became essential to the public's understanding of the occupier, of the art object, and the occupied spaces to the point of inseparability in popular perception.<sup>46</sup> The presentation- and media-savvy artist-residents utilized the ensuing public interest to gain support in the advocacy campaigns for LOMEX (such as with the Whitney meeting) and artist residency.

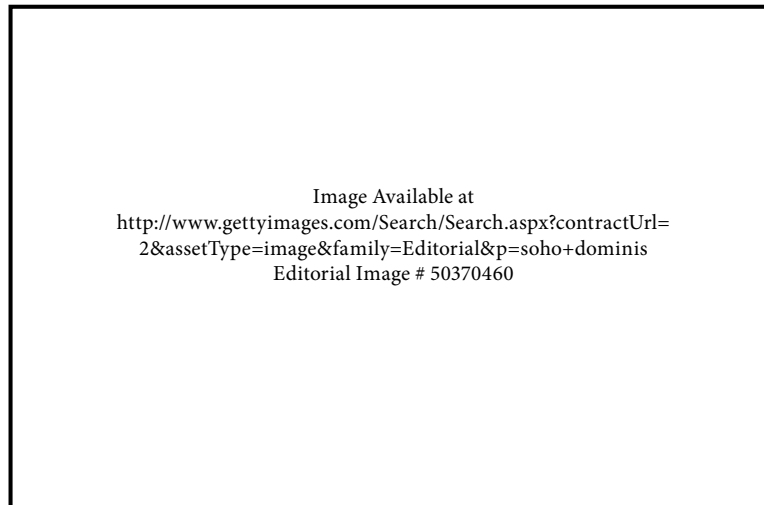


Figure 11. Nobu Fukul Hosting a Party at his SoHo Loft, New York City, 1970.  
 Photo by John Dominis, Time Life Pictures, Getty Images.

In a little over a decade, the SoHo artist community accomplished a complete shift in the cultural appreciation of previously maligned aesthetics of the manufacturing buildings. The unique aesthetic and manner of living attributed to the artist-residents, perceived by the public as highly innovative and avant-garde in approaches to space and materials, “loft living” found an unexpected degree of popularity in the American middle class, which in previous decades had sought alternatives to city living. Conservative notions of the comfort- and family-driven suburban ideal dominated images of the American home through the mid-century and created a system of social values that rewarded conformity and traditional goals. High rental rates and the opening of the parkway systems enabled the middle class to depart from the older city, which increasingly became regarded as outmoded social structures that housed the poor... and others who could not make the successful transition to modern American life.<sup>47</sup> The Federal government reinforced such notions by creating opportunities for home ownership but prioritized traditional styles and households through regulations and requirements within the programs.

<sup>46</sup> Field, *Lofts*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Hudson, *The Unanticipated City*, 55-56.

In the effort to increase the appeal of urban areas for the increasingly suburban-minded middle class, municipal governments and private companies focused on the redevelopment of the urban landscape through urban renewal projects rather than the re-envisioning of the pre-existing environment. Private projects developed in partnership with the city, such as Stuyvesant Town (Metropolitan Life Insurance, 1941) in the Lower East Side, specifically focused on making the city center more palatable for the middle-class by cleaning up the perceived mess and blight created by the industrial past. Unfortunately for advocates of the “raze and raise” method of city planning, urban renewal also served to inspire an awareness of and even nostalgia for the lost cityscape and community relationships. The legacy of urban renewal that had propelled the preservation movement in the 1960s and 70s helped to create a backdrop against which loft living and aesthetics could be seen as an appealing form of urban dwelling.

In 1977, a *Times* architecture critic declared SoHo-inspired historic building reuse to be “the keystone of a new urban movement that may be for the 1970s what the brownstone revival was for the early part of the decade.”<sup>48</sup> The SoHo community had proved the viability of a self-sustaining, mixed-use neighborhood that redefined the potential of city living for the public consumer and expanded the pool of structures considered worthy of the now-formalized preservation field:

SoHo was the first gritty, working commercial district to be designated an official New York City Historic District, quite a contrast to the residential enclaves of Georgian, Federal, and other period houses championed by preservationists at this time.<sup>49</sup>

Beyond the discussion of aesthetics, the advocacy movement had to prove the sustainable viability of the “dying” district to a government that had demonstrated time and again its lack of remorse for razing large portions of historic fabric in the pursuit of its own objectives.

SoHo was swiftly approaching a tragic end until the artists stepped in. While preservationists such as Margot Gayle and James Marston Fitch made the case for the historical architectural significance of the buildings, the artists made the argument for the district in the present and future importance of the city. The ability to make the district relevant to the city beyond the past proved critical to gaining support for the preservation of the district, which aesthetically and economically ran counter to the prevailing focus of the preservation movement at the time. The praise of SoHo-esque residential conversion

<sup>48</sup> Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 12.

<sup>49</sup> Roberta Gratz, *Cities Back From the Edge: New Life for Downtown* (Washington, DC: Preservation Press; New York: J. Wiley, 1998), 305.



and revival of old manufacturing neighborhoods into new art centers became a major source of media attention and means for the popularization of the artist district's lifestyle.<sup>50</sup> As Jim Stratton explained, "For various reasons, SoHo was a spiritual as well as an operational first—an entire neighborhood, recycled almost without external help, and hammered out in head to head confrontation with the city."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Gratz, *Cities Back From the Edge*, 305.

<sup>51</sup> Stratton, *Pioneering in the Urban Wilderness*, 21.

## Chapter Conclusions

Unlike the residents of revived historic brownstone or tenement districts elsewhere in New York City, the SoHo artists were confronted with an industrial district devoid of domestic space, supporting institutions, and actively threatened with redevelopment. Just as the healthy coexistence of manufacturing and residential spaces was inconceivable to city planners at the time, the successful repurposing of industrial or manufacturing structures for domestic use without demolition was equally unfathomable. Yet this group of uniquely equipped individuals came together as a community, united by shared sensibilities, and through various means successfully revived a “dying” neighborhood of forgotten buildings and in so doing redefined notions of urban planning, art and aesthetics, and downtown culture. The media proliferated the image of artists in their lofts to an eager public, who actively desired to appropriate aspects of the lifestyle, and stimulated the commercialization of that which had previously been “unpurchaseable” and unwanted. As a result, the public legacy of the artists has been relegated to the experience of living in a loft.

## Chapter 2: The Artists' SoHo

We didn't need the rest of the world. Rather than attacking a system that was already there, we chose to build a world of our own.

—Suzanne Harris<sup>1</sup>

The preceding chapter reviewed the artist community's multi-dimensional role in bringing to societal relevance an area that the city considered to be dying and for which the general public had little concern. This section returns to the same discussion but with the intentions of developing a greater understanding of the how the aesthetics and cultural life of the artist community directly related to the spaces that they inhabited. Evolving over time, the artists' attitudes towards life became manifest in the aesthetic and cultural expressions seen by the general public, who adopted "loft living" according to what they understood of the artists' pioneering lifestyle. This review will lay the groundwork for the subsequent claim that these cultural manifestations of their life in SoHo legitimize the title "Artists' SoHo."

The discussion begins with the "Preconditions of the SoHo Landscape," referring to both the formal condition of the structures and the political atmosphere that enveloped the district at the time. The second subsection, "Heritage: Aesthetic Culture of the Early Artists' SoHo," investigates examples of how the buildings and fabric of SoHo influenced the artist residents, and how the connection can be traced to their lifestyle and art works. "Heritage: Collective Identity Rooted in Art and Landscape" reverses the examination and explores the ways in which the artist community overtook and reinvented the spaces of SoHo and, in so doing, left physical marks on the landscape (some of which only exist now in photographs or stories).

<sup>1</sup> Lori Waxman. "The Banquet Years: FOOD, a SoHo Restaurant in the Early 1970s," *Gastronomica* 8:4 (Fall 2008), 27.

## Preconditions of the SoHo Landscape

Alternatively referred to as the Valley or “Hell’s Hundred Acres,” the SoHo district has historically played an important and even infamous role in the city fabric. Even though SoHo had served as a residential district for decades during the nineteenth century, the reinvention of the district in the late nineteenth century as a commercial and manufacturing center in the midst of the city solidified its identity as a working, not living, landscape. Able to survive due to physical proximity and supporting role to the garment and fur industries, businesses south of Houston Street spent the majority of early twentieth-century struggling to survive industrial and technological shifts. Meant to accommodate manufacturing structures over several floors, the long, narrow floor plates of the SoHo buildings were rendered obsolete by changes in mass-production ideology and most suitable for small manufacturing firms. Without any major companies to give economic and conceptual stability to the area, SoHo was largely perceived to be a dying district and even an industrial slum by renewal-minded planners.

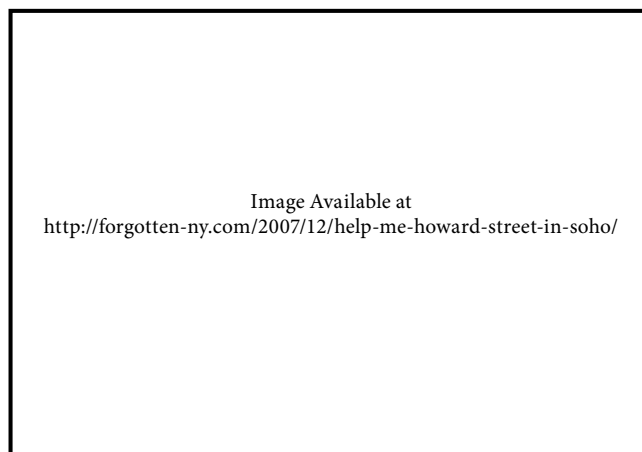
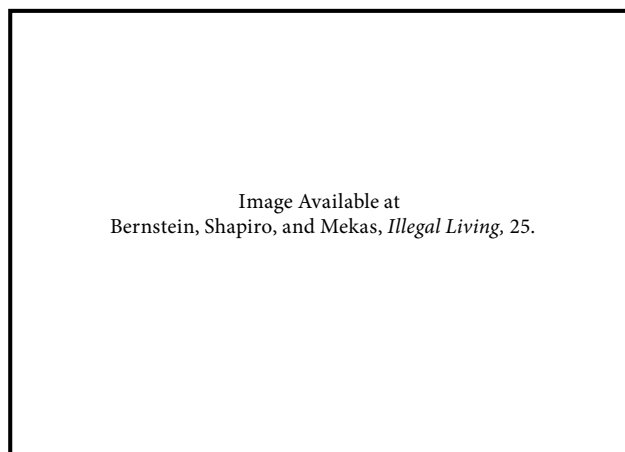
In 1962, the City Club of New York, a civic gentleman’s club devoted to housing and business redevelopment, published “The Wastelands of New York City,” a damning study prepared for the City Planning Commission and characterizing the Valley’s built fabric as antique, neglected, and increasingly vacant. In the report City Club president I.D. Robbins declared the area to be a commercial slum filled with dangerous buildings, little legitimate economic activity, and “so inefficient and unsanitary that industry avoids it even at extremely low rents.”<sup>2</sup> Robbins further concluded that the only viable solution was immediate and complete redevelopment of the area in order to reclaim valuable urban lands from post-industrial blight. The report’s authors advocated that the city repurpose the “ideally located acreage to new housing or to mixed uses without the necessity of relocating residential tenants [which do not truly exist in the area].”<sup>3</sup> With its emphasis on neglect on the part of landowners and tenants and consequential widespread neglect and obsolescence, “The Wastelands” seemed to provide the sufficient evidence to encourage the city to pursue renewal programs.

A second study of the valley area presented an effective counter to the City Club’s report and an altogether different outlook on the area’s future. Hired by Planning Commission Chairman James Felt, in

2 The City Club of New York City, “The Wastelands of New York City: a Preliminary Inquiry into the Nature of Commercial Slum Areas, Their Potential for Housing and Business Redevelopment,” (New York: The Club, 1962), 10.

3 Ibid, 10.

1963 Director of the Institute for Urban Studies at University of Pennsylvania and future New York City planning commissioner Chester Rapkin produced the comprehensive “The South Houston Industrial Area” planning study. The “Rapkin Report” not only gave the district its iconic “SoHo” moniker but also planted the seed that aging structures in the district not be so rashly sentenced to the bulldozer. Unlike the later aesthetic, architectural, or social preservation arguments of the artist community, Margot Gayle, and Jane Jacobs, Rapkin as an urban planner and economist examined the financial and structural viability of the SoHo landscape and industries.



(Left) Figure 12. Rag Truck on West Broadway, SoHo, New York City, circa 1970.  
Photo by Allan Tannenbaum.

(Right) Figure 13. 27-29 Howard Street at Crosby Street, SoHo, New York City.  
Margot Gayle, *Cast-Iron in New York*, Dover 1974.

The Rapkin Report provided the most thorough and objectively evidenced documentation of the area’s physical characteristics that had yet existed. Examining each block, lot, and structure, Rapkin and his assistants methodically inventoried the area’s economic composition, structural characteristics, real estate market, and planning issues and alternatives. Unlike “The Wastelands,” the Rapkin Report concluded that industry was yet alive in the district and addressed a major concern for the municipal government by providing for a significant number of jobs for unskilled immigrants. Contrary to the City Club’s assessment of area employment of 160 workers per acre, Rapkin found averages of 410 per acre.<sup>4</sup> Rapkin asserted that the district had future potential as a business “incubator” due to the area’s inexpensive rents and unit layouts better suited to smaller start-up companies.

<sup>4</sup> Petrus, “From Gritty to Chic,” 6.

Rapkin agreed with “The Wastelands” document in the general physical neglect witnessed throughout the district in his candid assessment but remained hopeful for the future relevancy of SoHo:

Typical of the entire area, however, is the fact that the non-residential activities take place in old, worn-out buildings that occupy a substantial proportion of the lot on which they are located. In some sections, of which the study area is typical, the loft buildings form an unrelieved façade block after block, which gives the narrow streets a canyon-like and dismal appearance even on a bright day. These dingy exteriors, however, conceal the fact that the establishments operating within them are, for the most part, flourishing business enterprises of considerable economic value to the city of New York.<sup>5</sup>

Rapkin attributed the state of the buildings to the construction technology’s “inherent limitations” and “deficient maintenance and housekeeping practices by the tenants and landlords in the area.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, while Rapkin felt that poor condition of the buildings stood at the core of the area’s problems, he did not determine the “worn out” buildings to be beyond repair. His inventory describes in detail building construction methods, materials, and current and future structural stability. According to his building condition survey, the majority of the buildings (48.8%) were assessed to require only maintenance and superficial repair. Rapkin details issues such as the mortar failure in party walls but largely determined the buildings to be structurally stable enough for reuse. Other tables in the report examine the prevalence of heating (only 10.2% of the total buildings were without central heating systems), washrooms (the majority had inadequate washroom situations), and interior building condition. The interiors proved to be in worse condition than the overall building structures but still salvageable: 48.8% of the buildings required moderate interior structural repair across 50% of the building but not gutting.

Rapkin’s report succeeded in persuading the CPC and Mayor Wagner to delay proposals for the holistic redevelopment of the district, but city planners continued to search for a solution to the area’s ills.<sup>7</sup> Despite such support of SoHo’s structural and functional capability, land-use principles and domestic lifestyle preferences precluded the notion that the district could serve a purpose apart from manufacturing. Though partaking of the same aesthetic style, the buildings were not constructed by bulk speculative development but rather individually, thus resulting in a sense of visual haphazardness in certain areas. Still, the height of the buildings, running uninterrupted down rather narrow streets, and the ac-

<sup>5</sup> Rapkin, *The South Houston Industrial Area*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>7</sup> Petrus, “From Gritty to Chic.” 7.

cumulated dirt created the feeling of standing in a dingy, “monotonous canyon.”<sup>8</sup> Though in accordance with city standards for lot and structural widths (twenty-five feet), the pre-zoning law buildings tended to be excessively deep, occupying nearly or even all of the lot—some buildings ran the full 100 to 200 feet of the block. The interiors were too narrow for current trends in manufacturing practice but appeared to be too large for any use aside from manufacturing. The miniscule size of the rear lots, if present, violated city regulations for backyards, and the combination of notions of the importance of light and air and SoHo's manufacturing district designation put residential use firmly out of consideration. Lastly, extremely few residential amenities existed nearby: there were no grocery stores, local schools, or churches within the district, and the only restaurants were workers' luncheonettes that were not technically family friendly in attitude or in time schedule.<sup>9</sup>

## Heritage: Aesthetic Culture of the Early Artists' SoHo

The remainder of this chapter is allocated to a discussion of the Artist's SoHo cultural heritage with regards to the development of particular aesthetic sensibilities and collective community identity as a result of the unique conditions of SoHo residency. Although the cast iron facades stand as the defining physical element of the SoHo district, due to the covert nature of their illegal occupation, the early artists' environment developed in the interior spaces. As will be discussed, the artists were fully aware of the features of the exterior streetscape, first framed by the massive windows and then actively explored. Consequently, the artists and residents cultivated a great sensitivity to the world around them in a manner that created uniquely “Artists' SoHo” expressions. The blurring of spatial, functional, and ideological boundaries, reinforced by the physical openness of the inhabited spaces to be defining feature of the SoHo artist residents' lifestyle. As a result, an unavoidable parallel overlap will be present in the investigation of the community's aesthetics and culture. It is also important to restate that this thesis is neither an art historical investigation of the early artists nor is it making the claim that the noted patterns were completely universal throughout the community.

<sup>8</sup> Rapkin, *The South Houston Industrial Area*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 11-12.

## Aesthetics: From “Loft Dwelling” to “Loft Living”

The obvious benefit of SoHo's post-industrial lofts lay in the enormous volume of space available at prices unrivaled in the rest of the city. Lofts in SoHo averaged 2500 square feet of open floor space, with some buildings offered 10,000 square feet on a single floor.<sup>10</sup> Artists sought such vast spaces in order to enable the coexistence of residential and work functions and thus negate the need for renting a supplementary space in which to work. As art works dramatically increased in size during the middle of the twentieth century, larger studios were sought to accommodate the growing canvases and then sculptural projects, and the artists created larger works because the larger studios could hold such size and bulk. In the words of SoHo artist Charles Ross, “[The 1960s were] a time when, since property was cheap, humongous space was an easy measure not of wealth, as later, but artistic ambition.”<sup>11</sup>

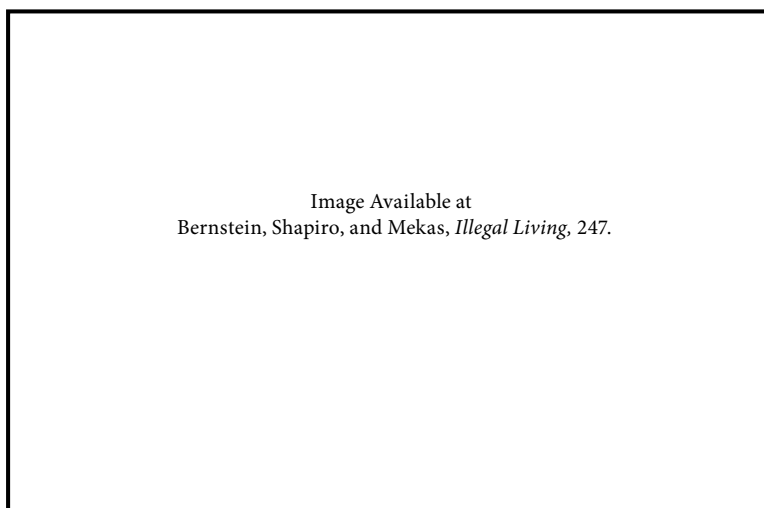


Image Available at  
Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 247.

Figure 14. A Typical Raw Loft Space, 119 Prince Street, SoHo New York City, 1970.  
Photo by Robert Weintreb.

The removal of the purpose for which the structures had been constructed liberated both the structures and the inhabitants, who took great advantage of the ability to simultaneously support multiple types of art and various uses.<sup>12</sup> Living lofts provided the opportunity to explore talents that other locations could not have accommodated. Nancy Graves divided her loft, which spanned the depth of an entire block, into four arenas dedicated to sculpture, painting, filmmaking, and living.<sup>13</sup> Trisha Brown utilized the structural “constraints” of her loft to nurture artistic expression by incorporating the col-

<sup>10</sup> Table 46, from Rapkin, *The South Houston Industrial Area*, 140.

<sup>11</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 172

<sup>12</sup> Judd “deplored the fact that [industrial] buildings were considered only in terms of their original purpose, ignoring the possibility of using them as living or office spaces.” (Stockbrand, Chinati, 14.)

<sup>13</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 31.



umns that ran the length of her loft into her dance choreography: soon dancers in her company were pushing off from and interacting with the very structural elements of the spaces in which they performed.<sup>14</sup> Liberation from functional purpose encouraged liberation from the divisions between art and life, formal and informal.

The fact that the founding artist-residents were required to adapt and convert post-industrial spaces, often in still-active industrial buildings, for residential purposes without supporting amenities stands as a defining element of the original Artists' SoHo aesthetics and cultural development. "Raw space" describes the unimproved industrial or commercial units that the artists came to convert to residential or studio use. Such living was not for the faint of heart; the lofts "were not cozy.... They were tough, primitive, and unforgiving."<sup>15</sup> The majority of commercial property owners only heated the buildings during the weekday business hours. Amplified by the canyon-like streets, street noise penetrated the large windows, the single-layer floors and walls, and the cavernous elevator shafts. "Unrefined and full of the grit and grime of their industrial past [or present],"<sup>16</sup> the spaces offered frustration for many artist-residents but also an indescribable attraction.

Often living in a state of perpetual construction for several years, the artist-residents aimed to keep costs low by purchasing materials from salvage (or in bulk, as Maciunas had) and by executing the minimal degree of alteration necessary to make spaces designed for production suitable or even useable for living. These units were typically devoid of permanent spatial divisions but were rarely empty when found and full of trash and detritus of the commercial past. Further complicating matters, the improvements and traces of residential life needed to be reversible in the case of a visit from the building inspector. Consequently, the physical building alterations revolved around superficial improvements such as the finishing of ruined floors. To make the spaces livable but also concealable, residents "resort[ed] to subterfuges" with hideaway beds, rolling furniture, pulley systems, camping and industrial equipment in the attempt to protect their secret.<sup>17</sup> For the artists, the innovative repurposing of obscure objects became a source of personal pride and expression as well as community notoriety. Over time, this manner of living creatively developed into the popular "minimalist" aesthetic integral to the popular "SoHo chic."

<sup>14</sup> Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 128.

<sup>15</sup> Orianna F. Banks and Rebecca Tanqueray, *Lofts: Living in Space* (New York: Universe, 1999), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 25.

The rather remarkable lack of physical comfort offered by the buildings may have hampered pursuit of the conventional residential experience but facilitated the creation of inspired and memorable lifestyle tableaux. Needing a mental escape during work periods, James Rosenquist once outfitted a section of his loft with sand, a lawn chair, a beach umbrella, and a sun lamp.<sup>18</sup> Residents would congregate on the “tar beaches” of the roofs and swim in the water tanks.<sup>19</sup> Attempting to humanize a built environment designed for utility, residents created their own backyards within their units. The artist Don Corrigan once remarked “Plants are to SoHo what lawns are to suburbia.”<sup>20</sup>

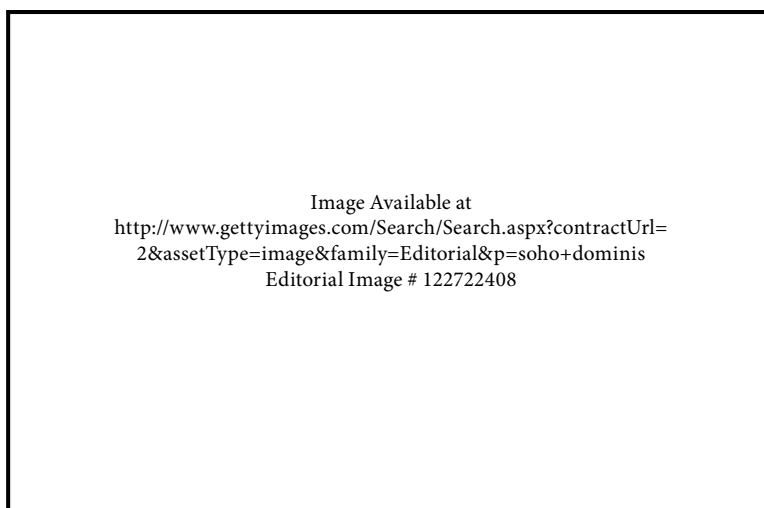


Figure 15. An Artist Working in His SoHo Loft, New York City, 1970.  
 Photo by John Dominis, Time Life Pictures, Getty Images.

George Maciunas remodeled the backyard of the 80 Wooster Street cooperative by opening up the basement with plate glass and covering the remaining outdoor surfaces with the white tile and paint he bought in bulk and supplied to tenants for their bathrooms. However, rather than leaving the space as a sterile, hospital-like environment, Maciunas transformed it into a pseudo-stage for living. Though the result of economy, the reflective, white background permitted the space to serve the various needs of its occupants, who congregated around the mimosa tree that Maciunas planted within the space and around which he determined the tile arrangement.<sup>21</sup>

18 Rosenquist, *Painting Below Zero*, 157.

19 Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 127.

20 Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 140.

21 Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 52.

Image Available at  
Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 50.

Figure 16. George Maciunas' Dumpling Dinner, June 29, 1971,  
80 Wooster Street Yard, SoHo, New York City.  
Photo Estate of Peter Moore/VAGA, NY.

Plants became a significant symbol of occupation in SoHo. Richard Kostelanetz remembers, "Walking south of Houston Street... I noticed in certain upper-story windows houseplants or interior lights shining into the night, both signifying that someone might be residing here."<sup>22</sup> However, plants could also result in an occupants' undoing by giving away their location to building inspectors. George Maciunas took matters into his own hands and planted a pair of Ailanthus trees up against the façade of Fluxhouse II (80 Wooster Street).



Figure 17. Ailanthus Trees in front of 80 Wooster Street, SoHo, New York City.  
Photo by Author, 2012

Both a statement of occupation and providing cover for some illegal electrical work, Maciunas' Ailanthus trees still stand. Though other trees border the streets of SoHo, the Ailanthus trees framing Fluxhouse II are unique in type and proximity to the building.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 52.

The artists also let the outside world in through the windows that articulated the cast iron façades. Legal or illegal, the residents of SoHo developed respect for the power of light in their lives. In loft environments such as those in SoHo, where the presence or lack thereof of windows can define one's experience of the entire space and all objects within, light and illumination became a physical material in and of itself. Charles Ross launched his exploration of prisms and light, the chief subject of his career, after moving to his top floor loft at 80 Wooster Street. Ross crafted his career-defining work *Sunlight Convergence/Solar Burns* on the roof of the building from 1971-72.<sup>24</sup> While for some the manipulation of light could define their career, residents also understood the power of light at night to reveal the residents' illegal occupation. Needing to protect their identities, residents kept the windows open during the day but after dark would close the windows, which they would darken from the exterior either by soot left to collect on the panes or drawn blackout curtains.<sup>25</sup>

Though appreciative of the cast-iron façade and structural proportions of 101 Spring Street, upon his initial viewing of the structure, Donald Judd remarked on the vast expanses of glass that furnished each floor with "a wonderfully bright, open look."<sup>26</sup> His loft in particular served as an ideal showroom for attention and display with its unusually large and tall windows.<sup>27</sup> The scenes from the streets below provided never-ending entertainment, especially during the weekday activities of the SoHo businesses.<sup>28</sup> David Novros tells of gaining inspiration from the cityscape, "I sit in the mornings at my desk, looking at my paintings and thinking and looking out on the street.... I get ideas."<sup>29</sup> While the windows framed the improvised performances of everyday life on the street, they also did little to filter the surrounding district's light, noise, smell, or happenings, all of which could inspire but could also overwhelm certain residents. As SoHo grew increasingly popular, Judd found the lower floors too distracting for his work. Consequently, he moved his studio to higher floors, which provided a new perspective on the streetscape with change in elevation. Unable to move vertically like Judd, Kostelanetz accepted a rear unit in his co-op building that would provide him with fewer distractions.

24 Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 120-121.

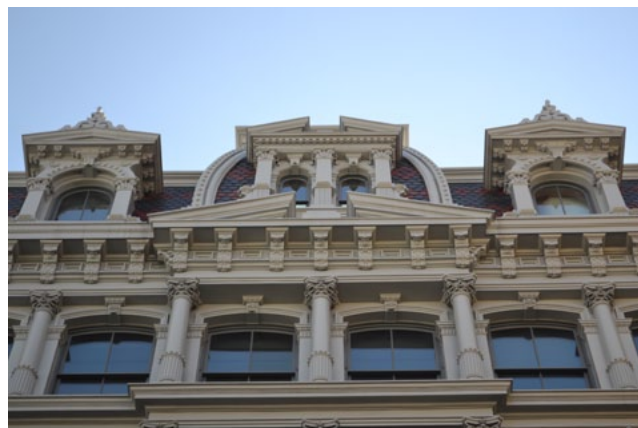
25 Yukie Ohta, "A Work in Progress," The SoHo Memory Project, Accessed 3 Apr. 2012. <<http://sohomemory.com/2011/01/05/a-work-in-progress/>>

26 Stockbrand, *Chinati*, 15.

27 Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 98.

28 Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 109.

29 *Oral history interview with David Novros, 2008 Oct. 22-27*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



(Left) Figure 18. Crosby Street Loft Interior, SoHo, New York City, circa 1970.  
Photo Yukie Ohta, SoHo Memory Project.

(Right) Figure 19. SoHo Cast Iron Mansard Roof, SoHo, New York City.  
Photo by Author, 2012.

The somber, workmanlike austerity of the interiors stands in sharp contrast to the complexity of the historic cast iron facades of the SoHo buildings. While the interiors are studies of structural clarity with materials generally left to read as what they actually are, the building facades are experiences in sleight of hand: materials are not what they seem, and the overt “structure” is but an applied skin. Illustrating what former Landmarks Preservation Commission Brendan Gill described as “anonymous ambition,” the cast iron facades were designed to lure customers, clients, and suppliers.<sup>30</sup> These palaces built to commerce display classical architectural features of every variety and detail: from the over-hanging cornices, to incorporated signage, window articulation, varied entrances, and columns.<sup>31</sup>

The artists shared an innate attention to materials and surface qualities derived from the environment and apparent in their artworks. The surface qualities of the cobblestone streets, which had grown increasingly deformed over the years, altered in color and texture over the course of the day and with the introduction of water. Likewise, the building facades, with the warped and rusting cast iron pieces in front of alternatively transparent, translucent, darkened, or lit glass, created a plethora of visual, temporal, and textural juxtapositions and tonal palettes from which the artists could see inspiration. The variety of metals and metallic effects proved to be especially interesting for the artists, who either directly utilized the medium for its diverse surface qualities and characteristics in their work or took cues from and mimicked the qualities (such as stiffness or color) of metals while actually using other materials.

<sup>30</sup> Gratz, *Cities Back From the Edge*, 308.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



Figure 20. Lee Bontecou in Studio with Works, SoHo, New York City.  
Photo at HumstonStudios.wordpress.com.

Sculptor and early SoHo resident Lee Bontecou transformed giant laundry bags culled from neighboring Chinatown into massive pieces that evoked the look and weightiness of metal.

James Rosenquist directly incorporated industrial materials such as those found in SoHo directly into the canvas of *F-111* (1964).<sup>32</sup> Rosenquist, in his “eagerness to involve and envelop the viewer,” manipulated the audience’s perception of material by incorporating two reflective aluminum panels “that could mirror the observer and provoke him to question what he was seeing.”<sup>33</sup>

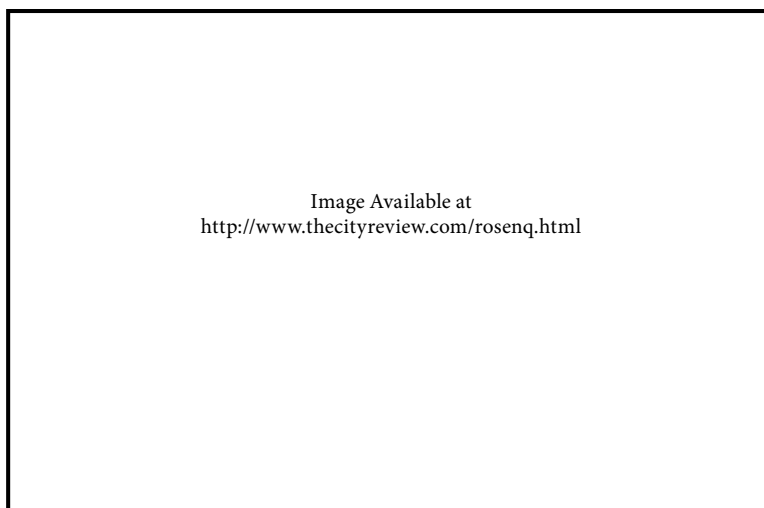


Figure 21. James Rosenquist, *F-111*, Oil on Canvas with Aluminum, 1964.

Though the vast majority of the painting was done over canvas, the aluminum was incorporated in such a way as to seem as if the metal lay under the entire image, an interpretation shared by many viewers.

<sup>32</sup> Beginning in the 1930s, sculptor David Smith used industrial materials and techniques to translate Cubist tenets to the round. Smith frequently cited the importance of his automobile-fabrication factory past as influential to his work. Smith was perhaps the first artist to truly develop his method based in industrial techniques, and his sculptures and processes paved the way for future generations to explore the fuller use of materials. (Davis. *Art and the Future*, 36.)

<sup>33</sup> Rosenquist, *Painting Below Zero*, 158.

The artists living in still-actively operated buildings occupied the higher floors, previously used by companies for nonpublic purposes such as storage and where little money had been dedicated to the concealing the interior structural systems. SoHo artist-residents such as Trisha Brown, Joe Schlichter, and George Maciunas stripped away layers of old paint from the walls and the columns out of necessity as well as interest. Just as he had done at his uptown gallery, Maciunas scraped off layers of old paint to get at the driving principles of the buildings. Maciunas was specifically interested in the brickwork and cast-iron detailing of his various buildings, and he worked to restore the cast iron sidewalk panels in front of Fluxhouse I (16-18 Greene Street) and integrated glass lenses to allow light into the basement.<sup>34</sup>

SoHo architecture alone offered a great deal of visual interest for the artists to harvest for inspiration and discovery. Trisha Brown's dance company, which moved from the Judson Memorial Church on Washington Square South to nascent artists SoHo, would traverse the neighborhood's buildings not via the street but by walking up and down the side of buildings and across rooftops.

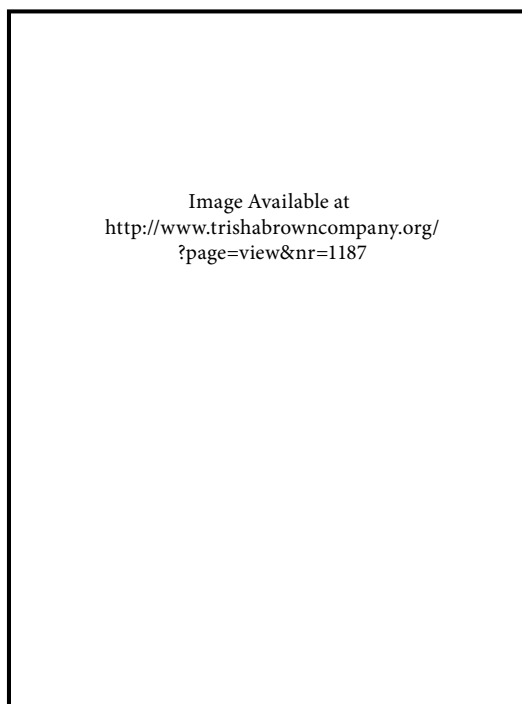


Figure 22. Joe Schlichter, performing Trisha Brown's "Man Walking Down the Side of a Building," April 18, 1970, 80 Wooster Street, SoHo, New York City. Photo by Peter Moore/VAGA, NY.

Sometimes during these "performances," which may or may not have been enacted for the benefit of anyone else but the engaged dancer, the dancers were accompanied by John Cage's music or wearing

<sup>34</sup> Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 52.



Rauschenberg-crafted costumes. The purpose of this exercise was not to test the limits of gravity or even the limits of art, but to explore the everyday world and space in ordinary and extraordinary ways, to see a familiar place from a new, arresting perspective.<sup>35</sup>

In 1968, the artistic collective The Performance Group acquired a truck garage, renamed The Performing Garage, on lower Wooster just above Canal Street. The burgeoning Garage's production of Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in 69* not only sold out nearly every night but also made SoHo a major stop on "[New York] City's cultural map."<sup>36</sup> The interior of the garage, a single-story, cavernous building devoid of interior pillars as well as chairs or any sort of formal seating arrangement, contributed to the effect of the production, which questioned the American status quo and the events in Vietnam.



(Left) Figure 23. Exterior, The Performing Garage, 33 Wooster Street, SoHo, New York City.  
Photo by Author, 2012.

(Right) Figure 24. "Tower of Thebes," from *Dionysus in 69* (Richard Schechner), performed by The Performance Group, The Performing Garage, 33 Wooster Street, SoHo, New York City, 1968.  
Photo from the Grant Group.

The actors would end the performance by re-submerging the audience into the heart of New York City, but on the actors' own terms:

The *Dionysus* performance typically concluded with the actors leading the audience out the front door into a neighborhood unfamiliar to most of us, concluding at a workingman's bar on the southeast corner of Broome St and West Broadway. Looking north from this corner, up SoHo's widest street,

<sup>35</sup> Waxman. "The Banquet Years: FOOD," 28.

<sup>36</sup> Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 51.



one had a framed portrait of the Empire State Building. From the same corner looking south, one had a magnificent view of the World Trade Center.<sup>37</sup>

In the same way that Trisha Brown's dancers had gained a new outlook on their environs by literally changing their orientation and perspective, the audience of Dionysus in 69 gained a new perspective through a redefinition of the performing arts, the space and manner in which performing arts might take place, and a re-introduction to the aesthetics of the district. The element of unpredictability contributed to the performance by the environment meant that no two experiences were identical.

<sup>37</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 20-21.

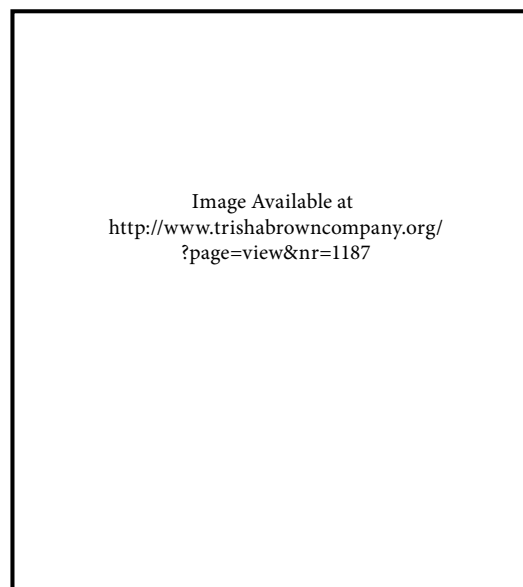
## Heritage: Collective Identity Rooted in Art and Landscape

Beyond the buildings that define the landscape and the visual expressions of this landscape into art, the first generation of SoHo artists established an inherently “SoHo” sense of place through the creation of closely aligned community culture.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of age, gender, sexuality, or race, the residents of early artists’ SoHo coalesced into a stable and supportive community of friends, colleagues, mentors, and patrons. The “illegal” auspices of their residency and a shared passion for art apart from the mainstream facilitated connection. Furthermore, as the decade progressed and the artists took an increasingly greater role in securing the neighborhood’s survival, the shared experience of fighting for their homes brought the residents closer together. But the most important component in the coalescence of SoHo as a community was the set of unspoken and unofficial rituals of living amongst the artists. Enabled and shaped by the SoHo environment, the rituals were defined by display and performance, the creating and sharing of food, and a sense of humor of their circumstances. The rituals of Artists’ SoHo were sometimes scheduled and often improvised but were integral to the collective identity of the community.

The community residents developed certain rituals and codes of conduct in order to adapt to residential living in the midst of an industrial landscape. For example, while some of the buildings did have passenger elevators, a great many buildings had only rickety stairs and a single freight elevator to provide vertical egress and be shared by all tenants. Particularly for residents on the top floors, the freight elevators choreographed much of the movement throughout the buildings. During the weekday business hours, the companies would provide an elevator man, as the elevators nearly always required manual operation from within the car. The elevators in these buildings were almost always of the first generation of industrial elevators, and though the lifts, like the cast iron buildings, had been groundbreaking technology, nearly three-quarters of a century later they were archaic, slow, temperamental, and aggressive-looking. One of the first major expenses of the co-op (and, later, the developer) in converting a loft building to residential use was to install an automatic elevator that could be called to a floor without being inside the cab. Such a luxury was rare in first-generation SoHo, however. For usage after-hours and on the weekends, the residents developed codes of etiquette for elevator operation.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Richard Kostelanetz describes the district at this time as a “college campus,” a statement that rings especially true when considered as a slightly physically separated, cultural institution for learning, discovering one’s self, and participating in experiments of social and civic expression. (Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists’ Colony*, 36.)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 24.



(Left) Figure 25. Original Elevator Car, Camilla McGuire's Loft, SoHo, New York City.

Photo Camilla McGuire, SoHo Memory Project.

(Right) Figure 26. Fifth Floor Freight Elevator Entry, 101 Spring Street, SoHo, New York City.

Photo by Elizabeth Felicella, Permission Judd Foundation.

In cooperative buildings, a resident was typically appointed as the elevator's keeper, making sure that the elevator was recalled from the ground floor at the end of the night. Out of courtesy for this individual, it was understood that if one returned home past a certain time, one simply took the stairs. And if the elevator was unable to be accessed, residents simply had to get creative in admitting visitors:

As industrial buildings didn't have doorbells, an upstairs artist often installed a bell near the front door and ran a wire directly into his loft. However, since the resident lacked an electrical connection to open the floor door, he or she had to run downstairs to open the building's front door or, more conveniently, throw a key customarily inserted in a thick sock.<sup>40</sup>

Other alternatives included yelling up to the resident or calling from a nearby payphone. When the elevator was simply at another floor, rules of etiquette again applied:

For after-hours, the residents necessarily agreed that whoever last used the elevator to get to his or her floor would be responsible for answering the next bell, taking the elevator to whichever floor demanded it. [Whoever had summoned the elevator would then take the other resident back to their floor].<sup>41</sup>

All the while, visitors would be forced to stand outside on a deserted sidewalk in a seemingly abandoned, non-residential neighborhood in varying degrees of darkness in the midst of Manhattan.

<sup>40</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

To a degree unknown in residential neighborhoods, the streets of SoHo were filled to bursting with workers and commercial trucks during the working hours of week and deserted at night because residential occupation was illegal. Although various city organizations, from the Real Estate Board to the non-affiliated City Club, produced reports such as “The Wastelands” that proliferated the notion that industry in SoHo had largely disappeared, Rapkin’s 1963 report documented the continued presence of a variety of businesses and a substantial workforce, claims supported by testimony from tenants and businesses of the district. For the artist and non-artist residents alike, the street scenes provided daily entertainment, inspiration, and annoyance.



Figure 27. “Congested Streets of SoHo, where Thousands of Men Work Every Day,”  
SoHo, New York City, 1970.  
Photo John Dominis, Routine Investigations.com.

Regardless of one’s feelings, the daily patterns of business activities were an important component of living in the district. Workers and residents interacted in the freight elevators and bartered for goods from each other.<sup>42</sup> During breaks, workers populated the streets and “would gamble on the sidewalk, tossing coins against the wall, while they drank cans of beer.”<sup>43</sup> Seemingly unperturbed by the presence of

<sup>42</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 122.

secondary group of laborers, the workers accepted the uncompetitive presence of the artists, and, like the district itself, despite rather rough or even menacing appearances, the workers (and district) were generally benign.<sup>44</sup>

The neighborhood was deserted. Early one morning, when [80 Wooster Street resident Jeanie] Black left for school in her car, a 300-lb guy came running after her.... "It turned out that he only wanted to tell me that I had left my school books on top of the car." Black soon learned that although the neighborhood felt empty, it was safe.<sup>45</sup>

Until the arrival of the artists, the workers were the sole patrons of the area's only restaurants, the hours of which ran according to business schedules. Two favorite worker-originated restaurants were critical to the SoHo social scene and feeding of both parties: Kast's Luncheonette and Fanelli's bar.<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, communal accord was struck between the two stakeholder groups of SoHo in the eating and drinking establishments. As neutral territory for both the workers and artists, Fanelli's played an important role in the integration of the workers and artist-residents through its shift from rough-and-tumble workers' haven to community hangout.<sup>47</sup>



Figure 28. Fanelli's Cafe, Prince Street at Mercer Street, SoHo, New York City, 2012.  
Photo Andrea H, Midtownlunch.com

44 Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 25.

45 Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 122.

46 Kast's Luncheonette is now Boom Restaurant, on Spring Street. Kast's closed following lunch service and on weekends. (Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 122.)

Fanelli's Bar is still open at the Southwest corner of Prince and Mercer Street. Taken over by Mike Fanelli in 1922 but open since 1847, Fanelli's is the second oldest continuously public establishment serving food and drink in New York City. A piece of true New York City history, the current owners promised Fanelli upon taking over the business that they would not alter the restaurant interior. A soup post has been added to the exterior but is located in a previously existing shed. (Yukie Ohta, "The Café on the Corner," The SoHo Memory Project, Accessed 6 Mar. 2012. <<http://sohomemory.com/2011/03/19/the-cafe-on-the-corner/>>)

47 The major shift occurred thanks to the enterprising local artist collective Videofreex, who aired a recording of the entire 1971 Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier at Fanelli's. Apparently, the bar was standing room only for the rest of the afternoon and night, and a group (employees or customers, it is unclear) had to make emergency beer runs. (Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 25.)

Apart from the bars and luncheonettes, the existing businesses of SoHo provided the artist community with rich sources of material for artistic and home décor purposes. In the recollections of nearly every SoHo residents, reference is made to street-salvage activities as standard parts of daily life. Even into the 1970s and the waning days of the industries, the streets of SoHo “were filled with piles of industrial stuff: wood, metal, rubber, textiles, construction material, and whatever.”<sup>48</sup> Salvage was common as late as 1974, when Richard Kostelanetz, who had long visited artist friends in the district, moved to a George Maciunas-run cooperative building:

Picking not only furniture but art materials off the street was a neighborhood game. Once I moved to SoHo, I found many of my bookcases on Friday evenings, which has been the designated time for putting out larger trash in my neighborhoods. Almost every evening I could find skids to keep certain furniture off the floors....<sup>49</sup>

Dumpster diving provided a round-the-clock counterpart to street salvage, and, akin to freight elevator operation, rules and etiquette established procedure for the event. Kostelanetz explains, “The first rule was not to approach any trash containers while someone else was selecting objects. It was also de rigueur to put the trash back



Figure 29. Dumpster Diving on Mercer Street, SoHo, New York City, 1977.  
SoHo Memory Project.

<sup>48</sup> Artists looked out for each other and left signs such as “it works,” on discarded equipment so that their peers would seize the opportunity before the trashmen took away the spoils.

(Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 24.)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Id.

Gordon Matta-Clark even went so far as to encourage such behavior when, “[He] put on the street [in front of 112 Greene Street] an industrial dumpster into which artists were invited to put things as well as [to] take [from the selection].”<sup>51</sup> The harvesting of urban detritus for artistic use facilitated the artists’ pursuit of producing art and redefining urban life in a decidedly non-traditional, non-serious, and non-formal manner.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, repurposing discarded manufacturing paraphernalia into pieces that were both works of art as well as useful household objects allowed the artists to reinterpret the physical character of the SoHo district into their domestic and professional art.<sup>53</sup>

The definitive alternative space, 112 Greene Street, was a raw and unfinished space that had been a former rag salvaging operation. Shortly after Gordon Matta-Clark moved in 1970 into the basement of Jeffrey Lew’s 112 Greene Street building, the building became a twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, workshop for the free use of artists needing space for work, display, or simply to discuss their art. Never locked, the “casual and inclusive character of 112 Greene Street conveys its aspiration to provide a putatively socialist model of exhibiting art.”<sup>54</sup> The un-pretentious character of 112 Greene Street facilitated (literally) groundbreaking installations that exposed the layers of the building such as the previously mentioned *Cherry Tree* and cuttings. The raw and almost ramshackle condition of the physical structure gave artists the freedom to “knock around in [it],” and not to be afraid of damaging the environment in pursuit of discovery.<sup>55</sup>

The best means of securing oneself as an accepted, respected member of the artist community in SoHo was by demonstrating genuine dedication to one’s craft and support of one’s peers through event attendance and participation in the art dialogue. An established but unspoken ritual of the first generation Artists’ SoHo was the Saturday afternoon “art walk.” With the streets clear of factory clutter, trucks, and workers on the weekends, one could explore the neighborhood’s offerings freely:

People serious about art—collectors, curators, professors, itinerant lectur-

51 Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists’ Colony*, 89.

52 As Allan Kaprow commented on his own use of “junk” in preceding generation of artists, “The materials were available everywhere on street corners at night.... It was very liberating to think of oneself as part of an endlessly transforming real world.” (William Kaizen, “Framed Space: Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting,” *Grey Room*, no. 13 (Autumn, 2003), 93.)

53 Shael Shapiro fashioned a swinging chair from a locally-scavenged packing crate cover, suspended from the ceiling with ropes. Another street find, a safe, painted yellow by Shapiro, became a storage cabinet. (Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 116.)

54 Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 60.

55 Ibid.

ers, artists, art-lovers, artist-lovers—would walk among the galleries and in the course of greeting friends would incidentally recommend current shows to one another, sometimes even giving new work its initial definition, not to mention meaning and value.... Since such advice constituted word-of-mouth advertising at its truest, reputations could be established on Saturday afternoons, especially for [first time exhibitors]. The SoHo art strollers were tough... but critical discriminations shared among them were honest.<sup>56</sup>

Galleries also closed their doors on Saturdays, thus allowing dealers would partake in the “strolls” or alternatively to set up a more formal “studio visit” of an individual artist’s loft.

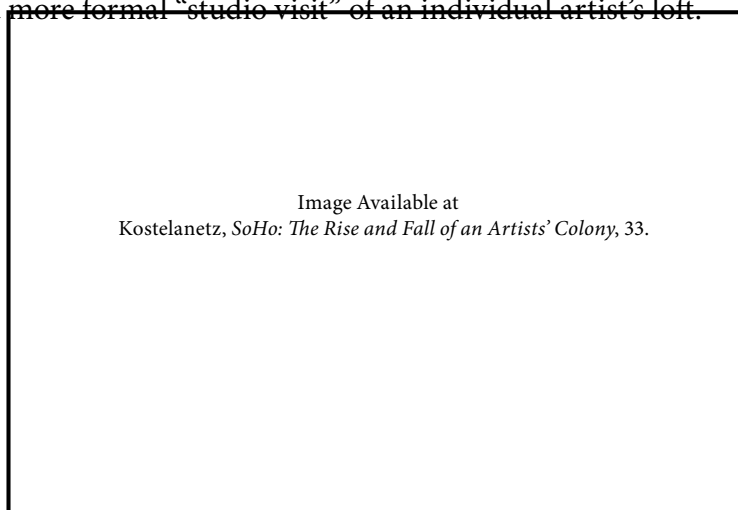


Image Available at  
Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 33.

Figure 30. Artist Walking His or Her Painting Across West Broadway at Broome Street, SoHo, New York City, April 1974.  
Photo Fred W. McDarrah.

Dorothy Miller, Ivan Karp, Paula Cooper, and many other power-players in the world of New York and international art frequently made such studio visits. Miller, the Museum of Modern Art’s first curator and a trusted collaborator of MoMA director Alfred Barr, once commented, “If I hadn’t known any artists, I certainly wouldn’t know a damn thing about art. You simply have to know the people and see them working and let them tell you about their pictures.”<sup>57</sup> While James Rosenquist worked on the *F-111* (1964) painting in his Broome Street loft, dealer Leo Castelli would bring visitors down to SoHo to show off the painting while Rosenquist worked. Fellow artists in the area would sometimes collaborate joint studio visits and would open their studios simultaneously as a semi-official, progressive studio tour. Such shows, like “10 Downtown” (1968), provided not only the opportunity to view the art and network also to personally view the loft-studios, an significant aspect of the tours’ draw.<sup>58</sup>

While a great many artists living in SoHo had obvious access to workspace, not all artistic en-

<sup>56</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Lindsay Pollock, “Mama MoMA,” *New York Magazine*, Accessed 15 Feb. 2012. <[http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/features/n\\_9461/](http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/features/n_9461/)>.

<sup>58</sup> Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 31.



deavors could be realized in the artists' personal spaces. As previously discussed, the alternative space became an important component of the life of the early and later SoHo art scene. alternative spaces were open to the neighborhood and dependent on either the goodwill of the property owner or the backing of some sort of organization. Like Jeffrey Lew at 112 Greene Street, Holly and Horace Solomon were important figures in SoHo as art patrons and facilitators. The Solomons owned a loft at 98 Greene Street that they made available to "allow artists and poets and performers to do their work, and have it be seen. The space was given to them and they could do with it what they wanted."<sup>59</sup> Of course, wealthy benefactors have patronized artists for centuries, but there seems to have been a pervasive, almost parental, desire to nurture young talent. As Holly Solomon once recalled, "[The late 1960s were] a time of great distress, when everything seeming to be falling apart, and for Horace and me opening [98 Greene Street] was a political statement. We felt that we couldn't change the world, but that privately we could do something."<sup>60</sup> Several artists were "discovered" or found their footing through such generosity.

At the corner Prince and Wooster Streets, a local artist establishment known simply as "Food" exemplified the pursuit within SoHo for a non-traditional space in which to explore non-traditional methods of art and performance. Although Food is most commonly attributed to Gordon Matta-Clark (as headliner), with Carol Goodden (as second in command), Jeffrey Lew, Tina Girouard, and Suzanne Harris, Food was truly the product of the SoHo community.



Image Available at  
<http://www.daviddeitcher.com/ARTICLES/10-Alternate/alternate.html>

( Left) Figure 31. Food Restaurant, 127 Prince Street, SoHo, New York City, April 1974.  
 Photo Mark Eiges, food-la.com.

(Right) Figure 32. Tina Girouard, Carol Goodden, and Gordon Matta-Clark in Front of Food Restaurant, 127 Prince Street, SoHo, New York City, 1971.  
 Photo Richard Landry.

<sup>59</sup> Waxman. "The Banquet Years: FOOD," 31.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Nearly every artist involved in SoHo in the first years of the 1970s experienced Food or had a hand in making Food among the most important, but perhaps the most forgotten, symbols of the first generation Artists' SoHo. The simple moniker, characteristic of the straightforward attitude of SoHo's artist establishments, belied its multivalent role in the area: Food was not only a place to eat or work, or to simply follow in the tradition of artist-oriented restaurants: above all Food stood as a place to take part in the community, to produce, display, critique, and to collaborate on art.<sup>61</sup>

But Food was not just unlike anything else in the SoHo community at the time. As reflected by the locally-sourced, daily-changed menu of Food, many SoHo residents were a community of "foodies" long before the rise of popular culinary culture:

[The restaurant is at the forefront of] a new trend in the food ethic. In seeking to provide an alternative to typical restaurant fare and ambience, the young owners [Goodden, Matta-Clark, et al] of these establishments are offering wholesome, satisfying, imaginatively prepared food, served unpretentiously, offered at a modest price.<sup>62</sup>

In pursuit of their own authenticity, Goodden and Matta-Clark (as architect and general contractor) designed the space based on personal reactions to the increasing mechanization of the era's restaurants. Desiring an institution that would both serve and represent the neighborhood and its denizens, Goodden and Matta decided early on to "Hang efficiency!"<sup>63</sup> Food originally purpose was not to generate profit but rather to drive the message of the importance of the community's support of itself (through a flexible work schedule and hiring policy that focused on local artists) as well as the idea that the quotidian aspects of life, even down to the washing of dishes, were legitimate subjects for art and viable parts of the creative process.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, Goodden and Matta conceived of the entire enterprise as a work of art, the manifestation of which resulted in an establishment that was "part [Do-it-yourself], part mimicry, part invention [Food was] both like and completely unlike the kinds of spaces that existed outside of SoHo."<sup>65</sup>

There was no need for a separation of art and life: at Food and in SoHo, art and life could be one and

61 Waxman. "The Banquet Years: FOOD," 24.

62 *New York Magazine* Review by Milton Glaser and Jerome Snyder, from Kostelanetz, *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, 90.

63 Waxman. "The Banquet Years: FOOD," 27.

64 Ibid, 29.

65 Ibid, 27-28.

the same. The physical restaurant itself even became an exhibition piece: Matta executed the first of his career-defining “cuttings” during the renovation of the restaurant, and the pieces were later exhibited at 112 Greene Street alongside his *Bronx Floors and Walls paper*.<sup>66</sup>

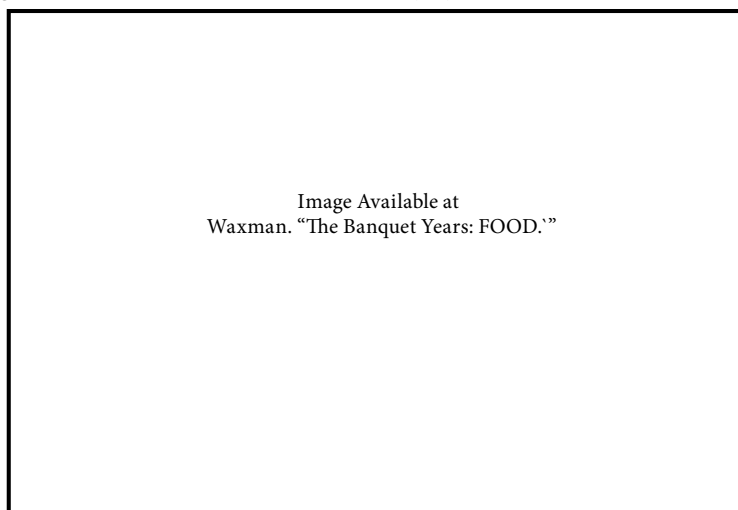


Figure 33. Gordon Matta-Clark with a Camera at Food Restaurant, 127 Prince Street, SoHo, New York City, April 1974. Photo by Cosmos Andrew Sarchipone, Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark.

Matta also shot an unfinished film *A Day in the Life of Food* in 1971-3 that aimed to document the restaurant from food procurement in the morning to after closing. Tina Girouard described the experience of Food as a performance and the space being “organized as a kind of stage, from its open kitchen to its long bank of windows, through which one could watch the action from Wooster Street, especially when the restaurant was lit up at night.”<sup>67</sup> A rotating roster of professional chefs and community volunteers “performed” regularly from the centrally located open kitchen and prep area for an “audience” of diners. The festivities even involved the human dish-washer (“Hang efficiency!”), who was typically a local artist-resident “deliberately sited within the space—a moving, breathing, expressive human dishwasher, not a machine.”<sup>68</sup> But the official performances took place on Sunday nights.

Although every day at Food provided opportunity for impromptu exhibitions, the Sunday Night Guest Chef Dinner series, organized by Matta, were recognized rituals in the SoHo artist community. The chef roster reads like a “who’s who” of the first generation of artists’ SoHo: Donald Judd, Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Landry.<sup>69</sup> Food hosted the themed Sunday dinners, dining

<sup>66</sup> Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 73.

<sup>67</sup> Waxman. “The Banquet Years: FOOD,” 28-29.

<sup>68</sup> Waxman. “The Banquet Years: FOOD,” 29.

<sup>69</sup> Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 71.

experiences that as often as not resulted in an actual/edible meal. Sunday Dinner hosts sometimes prepared real food, but often, influenced by the current personal or community interests, thematic concept overrode practicality. Matta once served a dinner that revolved around bones, and though never realized, Mark di Suvero proposed to hold a “sculptor’s dinner...served through the front windows by crane and eaten with screwdrivers, hammers, and chisels.”<sup>70</sup> Often irreverent but always creative and tied to the SoHo landscape and artist community, Food in many ways epitomized the experience, collective identity, and cultural heritage of the first generation Artists’ SoHo.

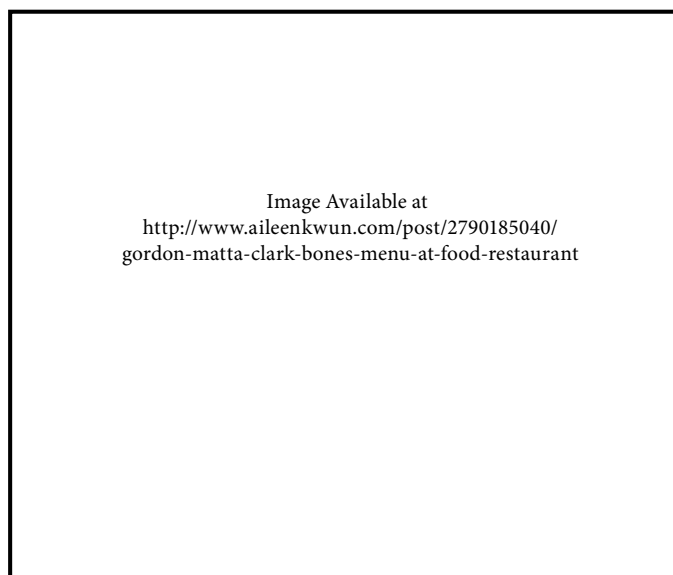


Figure 34. Gordon Matta-Clark, Bones Menu at Food Restaurant, Food Restaurant, 127 Prince Street, SoHo, New York City, circa 1971-1973.  
 Uncredited Photo.

<sup>70</sup> The “Bones” mean, served on February 20, 1972, consisted of piles of bones arrayed and stuffed with various ingredients. Another performance, titled *Alive*, included the serving of live brine shrimp hidden away in the recess of a hardboiled egg. (Ibid.; Also Waxman. “The Banquet Years: FOOD,” 29.)

## Chapter Conclusions

The unique result of the temporal and physical context and the individual participants, the collective identity of the Artists' SoHo was expressed through the lifestyle, art and activities in which the residents participated. The artist community appropriated the raw material of a historic, fading, but still active manufacturing landscape and through response and manipulation developed a distinctive identity and heritage. The mutual adaptability of the physical environment and the artist residents, the equilibrium achieved between the artists and the industries, and the residents' desire to investigate various talents generated the cultural "Artists' SoHo" and enabled the community to create a largely self-sustaining system of living. However, as demonstrated in the fate of the Food enterprise, the consequences of outside interventions beyond the control of the artists and the introduction of values fundamentally different from the original intent of artist- and worker-driven community establishments upset community's balance. As a result, the vast majority of such businesses, integral to the collective experience of the SoHo artist community, succumbed to financial pressures or lost the "magic" of the original enterprise as the artists began to disband. Today, in spite of an active preservation framework that preserved the structures, these physical manifestations of the SoHo artist community's cultural identity such as Food and 112 Greene Street are anonymous and forgotten in the SoHo landscape.

Image Available at  
<http://thisisnotashop.wordpress.com/gordon-matta-clark/>

Figure 35. Food Restaurant, Then (1971) and Now (2007), SoHo, New York City.  
 Uncredited Photo.

## Chapter 3: Evaluation of Preservation in SoHo

New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its past. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. A city composed of paroxysmal places in monumental reliefs.

—Michel de Certeau<sup>1</sup>

Shifting from an examination of how the SoHo artist community existed within in the SoHo environment, the final chapter turns a critical eye to the interactions between the founding SoHo artist community and the historic preservation field. While investigation reveals that no single party is to blame, certain weakness within the preservation system have enabled and even facilitated the erosion of the SoHo artist communities cultural heritage and memory in the physical landscape and in societal memory. The analysis concentrates on the official preservation designation reports, the tools that exert potentially the greatest influence in determining the focus of preservation practice for a heritage artifact. Examination of preservation practice in SoHo raises pressing questions for how present-day preservation practices might be improved so as to become more in line with current values of cultural heritage representation in SoHo and beyond.

Special attention is paid to the factors that have historically complicated the memorialization of the SoHo artist community as well as the commemoration of urban artist communities across the country. The chapter examines the opportunities for the preservation field and current stakeholders to engage and reestablish the memory of the SoHo artists using preservation mechanisms currently in place. Discussion concludes with a “call to arms” for preservation field and suggestions for how the “preservation toolkit” might be augmented in order to have great efficacy and relevance in current and future society.

<sup>1</sup> Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 90.

## Official Preservation Intervention

### Pursuing Municipal District Designation

Advocacy for SoHo's designation as a local landmark historic district commenced in 1966 following the formation of the municipal Landmarks Preservation Commission by Mayor Wagner in the previous year. Led by Margot Gayle, the districting efforts revolved around the preservation of the district's legacy as an unparalleled assemblage of nineteenth century cast-iron structures. As discussed in the Synopsis chapter, anxiety stemmed from the threat of demolition on account of the LOMEX project but the commencement of construction on the World Trade Center in 1966 also caused concern. Advocates for the built environment worried that urban renewal activity would spread north of the World Trade Center Development Area to the areas of lower rise, aging buildings as had happened elsewhere in Lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village, Stuyvesant Town, Coenties Slip). In tandem with these concerns, artists in SoHo and elsewhere in the city were growing increasingly agitated by repeated displacement on account of redevelopment and zoning regulation. The artist community of SoHo joined in the fight to overthrow LOMEX and stabilize their residency in the industrial district in the city and SoHo in particular.

Though the threat of displacement via renewal initially stimulated the artist community's participation in the larger fight to prevent LOMEX, several members of the SoHo art community had a deeper interest in the history aspect of the SoHo landscape. Julie Finch, chair of the Artists Against the Expressway group, developed a great interest in the history of SoHo and was instrumental in securing the successful historic district designation through her exploration of the history of the cast-iron building at 101 Spring Street that she shared with her husband, Donald Judd, and their children. Her investigation into her own building soon expanded to the rest of the neighborhood, and information she and others collected ultimately became part of the district designation report.<sup>2</sup> With the support of the artists, pursuit of LPC designation reignited in 1970 with another Request for Evaluation for historic district status for the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District.

<sup>2</sup> Certificate of Appreciation to Julie Finch and Donald Judd from the Landmarks Preservation Commission, City of New York, Judd Foundation.

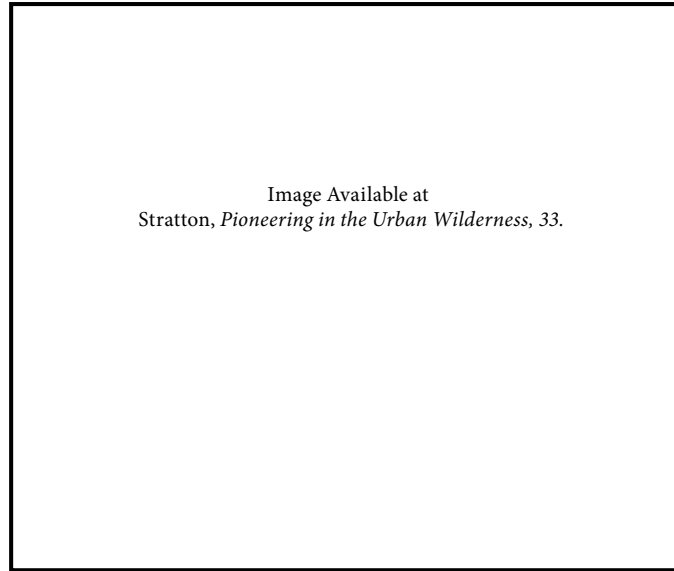


Figure 36. Scenes from Inaugural SoHo Artists' Festival, SoHo, New York City, 1970.  
Uncredited Photo.

The previous year, the SoHo Artists Association had begun to develop a more direct relationship with the City Planning Commission concerning the legitimacy of the artists' rights to continue living in the manufacturing district of SoHo. In 1970, the SAA and the city Department of Cultural Affairs collaborated on the inaugural SoHo Artists' Festival, which aimed to gain the support of the entire city in proclaiming SoHo as a valid urban community. In the aftermath of the LOMEX project's demise and in light of the increasing power of the SoHo artists, in 1971 an amendment to the city's Zoning Ordinance officially permitted live-work space for certified artists in the manufacturing district of SoHo. The same year, SoHo's first multi-gallery complex opened at 420 West Broadway, a tour de force of international art tastemakers Leo Castelli, Illeana Sonnabend, John Weber, and Andre Emmerich, all located in a historic cast-iron former warehouse. Still, another year would pass as a final redevelopment proposal stalled the Landmarks designation. In 1972, the city Board of Standards and Appeals approved the zoning variance required for "The Slab," a behemoth sports complex proposed by major Canal Street developer Charles Low. Though the project gained support from certain groups in the areas around SoHo, staunch opposition by the SAA convinced the CPC to advise against the venture. The Slab proposal was officially terminated in 1973, and the Landmarks designation finally moved forward.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Stratton, *Pioneering in the Urban Wilderness*, 37.



## SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Designation Reports

### Local Designation (1973); National Register of Historic Places, National Historic Landmark (1978)

The 1973 local Landmarks designation report for the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District speaks to the causes of architectural historians, city planners, architects, and the artists. Thorough documentation of the area's historic architectural singularity is complimented by a high degree of awareness and hope for the future impact that the area could have on the fields of city planning and historic preservation. Acknowledging the inarguable importance of the cast-iron structures, the authors also give substantial attention to the recent years' development of the artist community:

It was not until the 1960s that a new movement began to stir. This, surprisingly enough, was caused by the trend among artists [to move into the] high-ceiling, empty lofts of SoHo.... With the help of City agencies, the zoning laws were imaginatively amended to permit the migration of artists into the area without, at the same time, driving out the marginal industries.... The result has been that the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District is fast becoming one of the most important creative centers of contemporary art in the nation.<sup>4</sup>

Though Chester Rapkin had coined the "SoHo" nickname through his 1963 report and the final designation report attributes the "SoHo-Cast Iron" name to the area's structural diversity, the use of the label indicates the broader relevancy that the artist community had brought to the district. The artists' explicit contribution to the aesthetics of the art world and popular culture is not clearly explicated beyond the creation of a locus of contemporary art, but the artists are at least acknowledged in the district's revival. Furthermore, these aesthetic and cultural developments were still in early stages at the time of the designation and not sufficiently established to warrant designation based on such claims.

Although the designation is technically based on the architectural history argument of the cast-iron structures, the authors of the report are attentive to SoHo's potential significance in the future of urban design history:

[T]he innovative zoning provisions are demonstrating how, with appropriate provisions for health and safety, manufacturing, commercial and certain residential uses can exist side-by-side. If the demonstration continues to succeed as it has during the past few years, SoHo may well provide a wider lesson. With a little imagination, effort and ingenuity, exciting alternatives

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Steinke et al, "SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Designation Report," Landmarks Preservation Commission, Department of City Planning, the City of New York (1973), 8.

to demolition can be found for the stagnant and decaying areas of our cities [with the further advantage] of preserving the continuity of a city's cultural and historic heritage.<sup>5</sup>

A single decade after a massive revision of New York City's zoning ordinance, the artists in SoHo had overturned accepted planning theory by demonstrating the viability of appropriate mixed-use. Furthermore, in the denouement of the urban renewal era, the SoHo community proved the viability of preservation and adaptation of old neighborhoods. But the descriptors such as "imagination, effort and ingenuity" that imply a shift in perception are ambiguously attributed to either the artists or the city planners.<sup>6</sup> Regardless, in a document dedicated to the glorification of the past, the acknowledgement of importance of the present and excited expectation of future potential is striking.

Moving from the palpable excitement of the local historic designation and keeping in mind the swift rise in popularity and changes in the neighborhood in the following years, the 1978 National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and National Historic Landmark (NHL) nominations are quite devoid of recognition of the area beyond its architectural history, and the artists are basically non-existent. The NRHP and NHL listings of the "SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District" occurred within months of each other in late spring of 1978.<sup>7</sup> Both documents were excerpted directly from the municipal designation report, and the only difference between the national documents lies in a short appended section on a selection of district structures determined to be of importance above the other buildings in the area in the NHL report. The national designations use the same name as the local historic district, and in the national context the assertions of significance are rooted in the physical landscape alone. The "SoHo" label appears purely to be locational; zoning changes and the artists' reestablishment of the area are not mentioned as causes for significance. The label would be clearer without the hyphen as simply the SoHo Cast Iron Historic District. The exclusive focus on the district's cast iron nature is confirmed by the NHL designation, which, through thematic study, determined the area to worthy of such as a representation of the "Arts and Commerce of the Nineteenth Century."<sup>8</sup>

5 Steinke et al, "SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Designation Report," 8.

6 Ibid.

7 The reason for the lapse of time between the local designation and the national designation is unknown, but the five years that passed in between the two periods of designation leads one to consider the possibility that preservationists were awaiting a particular event.

8 "National Historic Landmarks Program," National Park Service, Accessed 2 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.nps.gov/nhl/>>

## Aftermath of Government Intervention

Though theoretically intended to protect the SoHo building, small businesses, and the artist community from non-artist interlopers and high-rise redevelopment, the AIR program and local Landmarks designation also contributed to the “fall” of the first generation of artist residents. Landmark regulation preserved the integrity of the building facades, but the city created a high demand for the loft spaces by not allowing for the creation of new buildings aimed at accommodating the new residents. Though review was required for alterations within the district, because the interventions of the artist community were not a part of the designation, only those traces of the artist community that were owned by artist-residents could be assured of protection. While real estate developers could not rebuild or expand the district’s structures, the newly in-demand aesthetics and historic value of the loft buildings negated the need to do so. Loopholes and lack of enforcement in the artist and loft conversion certification systems enabled a steady stream of non-artist residents to infiltrate the area and for illegal speculative conversion to occur at a rampant rate. Of the 555 industrial buildings in the SoHo district in 1977, 178 were converted to residential use, and only thirteen were city-certified.<sup>9</sup> Tourism markets based on arts, culture, and architectural history fueled the rise of increasingly upscale businesses. The transformation to a white-collar, upper-middle-class neighborhood had begun, and the 1977 expansion of the city’s J-51 tax abatement and exemption program to include residential conversions of manufacturing and commercial structures signified the city’s commitment to gentrification and de-industrialization.<sup>10</sup>

### Dispersal of the Artists

From tendencies to rebel in living and art in pursuit of their own ideals to the desire to make city-expressive art in new ways, the shared sensibilities of the individuals of the artist community prompted the development of a collective identity based not on economics, ethnicity, or origins, but rather on ideology. The tendency of that the artists to connect to the community and the ability of that community or district to serve their needs, rather than the site itself, greatly complicates arguments in support of

<sup>9</sup> Petrus, “From Gritty to Chic,” 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 34.

For more information on the J-51 tax abatement and exemption program, please see William Eckstein, “An Evaluation of New York Loft Conversion Law,” *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, Vol. 10:3 (1981).

preserving the memory of artist communities. When the spaces or the community no longer could fulfill their needs, artists would depart, often before developing a true attachment to place, though they had a dramatic impact on the landscape. As the area became increasingly busy and non-artist driven, Donald Judd shifted his focus to his compound in Marfa, Texas, where he found even greater space to pursue his philosophies of permanent installation. The district became increasingly commercialized with greater numbers of galleries, boutiques, restaurants, and developer-driven loft conversions aimed at enticing the public consumer rather than supplying and supporting the artist-producer.

By the mid 1970s, a second generation of artists arrived in the landscape and took advantage of the new residential amenities typical and professionally-converted lofts. Some previous residents of the previous generation accepted the new conditions and artist community- and worker-oriented establishments attempted to compete with the new businesses. However, the inherent values of places like Food, with even its name attesting to its anti-“big business” stance, were at odds with the new economy of the area. The permanent loss of two of early SoHo’s leaders, Gordon Matta-Clark and George Maciunas, both of whom died in 1978 due to illness, and the shift of Judd’s focus to Texas further weakened the bonds with the community. As a result, though many stayed in the area (particularly those that owned their units), the pioneering collective continued to unravel. As part of another generation (regardless of age), the new residents did not share the same set of sensibilities and collectivity enjoyed by the founding community. Consequently, a new, commercially-driven system developed to support the new community, thereby allowing for displacement not only of original stakeholders but also of the physical markers, memory, and spirit of their occupancy.

### **Conflicting Notions of Preservation Success**

Examination of the changes in SoHo following the nomination muddles a determination of rightful blame for the disappearance of the artists. A myriad of factors contributed to the dissipation of the first generation artist community, the infamous rise of gentrification, and the erosion of public and physical memory of the pioneer artists.<sup>11</sup> The defeat of LOMEX, the refocusing of the New York arts’

<sup>11</sup> Just a few of the players: The original artist-residents, a new generation of artist-residents, incoming waves of non-resident artists, tourists, long-established SoHo businesses, incoming businesses, City Planning, the Real Estate Board, the LPC, other professional preservationists, amateur advocacy groups, the popular media, the developers, legal and illegal loft converters, illegal residents.

scene and the renewed excitement surrounding its reinvigoration by this new class of artists, and the broadening of architectural perspective soon turned into an urban spectacle. SoHo itself became an art object for public consumption, a phenomenon since termed the SoHo Effect. Similar events occurred in the artist centers of Minneapolis and San Francisco in the years concurrent and just following SoHo, and the recent convergence on the Meatpacking District of Manhattan is reminiscent of the excitement that surrounded SoHo in the mid-1970s.<sup>12</sup> Equally unfathomable as the district's gentrification is the swiftness and completeness with which the first generation of artist residents appears to have departed the scene following their victory in residency legitimization and preservation. Their physical memory in the neighborhood has since followed suit, until the only vestiges that remain are from those residents able to remain in the district by purchasing their property before the prices rose.

## **SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension (2010)**

### **A [Missed] Change to Cement the Memory of the Artists' SoHo**

In 2006 the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America (MCVSA) commenced the nomination process for a SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension. MCVSA proclaimed the extension “a wonderful way to honor the life and work of [Society co-founder] Margot Gayle...the world's leading expert on cast-iron architecture, [who] first brought to the public's attention the incredible importance of SoHo's cast-iron buildings.”<sup>13</sup> The Statement of Significance put forth by the MCVSA in the 47-page illustrated nomination packet makes clear the laser-focus of the group:

Designated in 1973, the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District preserved the world's largest concentration of Victorian full and partial cast-iron-fronted facades in the world. Spurred by the work of the indefatigable Margot Gayle, the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District protected not only the area's cast-iron architecture, but also many outstanding masonry buildings. Over thirty years after designation, many of the cast-iron-fronted and masonry buildings in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District have been carefully restored, and the district is today one of New York City's most architecturally renowned neighborhoods.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Kirk, “Recycling Old Warehouses,” *Urban Land* (Jan 2009), pp. 54-61.

<sup>13</sup> “SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension Designated May 11, 2010,” Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, Accessed 2 Mar. 2012. <<http://Metrovsa.org/SoHo.htm>>

<sup>14</sup> “The Proposed SoHo-Cast iron Historic District Expansion,” Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, Accessed 4 Mar. 2012. <<http://metrosva.org/MetroVSA-SoHo%20Report-0306.pdf>>

Architect and MCVSA member Stephen Gottlieb contended that the landmarking was not in reaction to any major development pressures in the unprotected area and that few of the historic buildings had been demolished or left to ruin. Rather, the move to amend the landmark designation resulted from the Society's 40th anniversary, concerns of unsympathetic storefront alterations and the fact that the "buildings on the far side of West Broadway are of the same type and should have been included at the start."<sup>15</sup> The word "artist" does not appear in the entire document.

Though the MCVSA concentration on cast-iron architecture may be justified due to the nature of organization, the insufficient acknowledgement of the artist community in the official 2010 designation report is inexplicable. The 2010 document presented the perfect opportunity for the resolution of the story begun in the 1973 report. However, instead of concluding the storyline of the 1960's artist-residents and the innovative alternatives to zoning and reuse, the 2010 district is positioned as the city's exemplar of economic success. No longer a beacon for the way in which a city can learn (with regards to land-use integration) or an exciting alternative to demolition (by popularizing the reuse of historic structures), the district has become an economic commodity, "one of New York City's most attractive and popular residential neighborhoods and shopping destinations."<sup>16</sup>

As the statement continues, the 1960s artists are mentioned but as a prelude to the 1970s, when SoHo becomes "one of the most important creative centers of contemporary art in the nation."<sup>17</sup> The salvation of the district in 1973 is credited to the LPC, and then focus shifts quickly back to the district's increasing trendiness, with gallery owners, a few major artists, and members of art-media standing as the representatives of the creative class. The authors of the report even address the gentrification of the district, which reportedly housed 5,000 artists by 1978, stating, "The area was becoming more fashionable as a residential and commercial address, and many of the artists who had revitalized the once-neglected district were priced out of the gentrifying neighborhood."<sup>18</sup> Yet this fact, which should cause reflection on why the gentrification was so pervasive, soon is forgotten in favor of the framing of the displacement

15 Christopher Gray, "Not Exactly the Wild West," *The New York Times* (11 May 2008). Proquest Historical Newspapers. Accessed 20 Jan. 2012.

16 "SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension Designation Report." Mary Beth Betts, ed., Landmarks Preservation Commission, Department of City Planning, the City of New York (2010), 6.

17 Ibid, 6.

18 Ibid, 8.

The accuracy of this number is highly debatable—the number of actual artists in the district is likely far less—over the years, the criteria for application had continued to widen, loopholes had been discovered, and a lack of regulation by the DOB likely means that this estimate is overstated. Nevertheless, the number demonstrates the popularity of SoHo as an artist, and particularly a gallery district during the mid- to late-1970s.

as the opportunity for the area's financial success. The final comment on the extension's ruling, found in "Findings and Designation," focuses mostly on the historic architectural excellence and the importance of SoHo today, with a quick transition between these two periods provided by the 1960s artists who began the conversions. Apart from economics, SoHo's greatest feature, according to the report, is that the district has been retained in a historically accurate and cohesive streetscape.<sup>19</sup>

Another red flag that the sought-after district extension might not be sensitive to the perpetuation of the SoHo artists' community arose in a 2008 New York Times "Streetscapes" column by Christopher Gray. Gray highlights an instance where LPC protection in the nominated extension area would have been advantageous in preventing the realization of a particular façade-painting intervention characteristic of the Artists' SoHo.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 37. Dorothy Gillespie Wall Mural, Houston and Mercer Streets, SoHo, New York City, circa 1970, sponsored by City Walls.  
Uncredited Photo, from SoHo Memory Project.

Eccentric wall art had once been a familiar aspect of the SoHo streetscape. The non-profit organization City Walls (established 1969) worked with artists and communities to revitalize the inner city through public art. City Walls sponsored a number of projects in SoHo, from a Dorothy Gillespie mural at Houston and Mercer to a Jason Crum piece at West Broadway and Houston.<sup>21</sup> However, it seems that the only wall art acceptable in SoHo in the present day lies firmly in the realm of product placement, whether that product be clothing or SoHo itself.

<sup>19</sup> "SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension Designation Report." 8.

<sup>20</sup> In contrast to an recently built infill building (455 West Broadway, Beyer Blinder Belle, 2007) across the street, described by Gray as being "so polite that in passing by, you would not notice," the façade of Ernest Aebi's building at 460 West Broadway would likely have been disapproved of by the Commission: around 2001, Aebi commissioned the three-story-high mural of black wolf heads devouring fleeing pigs in pink, black and blue from painter Friedrich Gross. (Gray, "Not Exactly the Wild West.")

<sup>21</sup> Yukie Ohta, "From City Walls to City Malls: Public Art in SoHo," The SoHo Memory Project, Accessed 6 Mar. 2012. <<http://sohomemory.com/2011/03/19/the-cafe-on-the-corner/>>

A recent victory in favor of the preservation of the memory of SoHo as an artists' community concerns the survival of *The Wall*, an eight-story minimalist art installation built in 1973 by Forrest Myers. The vibrant blue of the paint articulating the West Houston Street sidewall of 599 Broadway and visibility from all angles of approach earned the piece the title "The Gateway to SoHo." In 2002, after five years of complaints by the building's owners, the LPC gave the owners permission to dismantle and remove the work in order to repair an interior wall.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 38. Forrest Myers, *The Wall*, West Houston Street, SoHo, New York City, 1973. Uncredited Photo, from SoHo Memory Project.

In fall 2004 the city filed suit against the building owners, who had yet to replace the work. Yet the collaborative advocacy of the SoHo Alliance, Myers, and the LPC ultimately prevailed and reached an agreement with the owner.<sup>23</sup> However, while one can classify the reinstallation of *The Wall* as a triumph for the artists' cultural heritage, the victory also brings to light the importance of economics in the decision making process of the LPC with regards to the preservation of cultural history: while the highly visible *The Wall* merited the intervention of the LPC, the less overt 1975 trompe l'oeil mural by Robert Haas at 112 Prince Street has been left to deteriorate and be defaced by graffiti. The LPC appears to be making its priorities clear: of the commission's six stated objectives, economics is as important as aesthetics and cultural pride combined.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The owners contended that the artwork was the cause of structural damage and water leakage in the building. The LPC stipulated the replacement of the artwork upon completion of the work.  
(Chris Bragg, "High, Bright, 'The Wall' will return to SoHo wall," *The Villager*, 76:47 (18 Apr. 2007).)

<sup>23</sup> The legal process presented some obstacles with the judge ruling that because the artwork was not technically a part of the building, the owners could not be forced to maintain the structure without compensation. Consequently, an agreement was reached with the owners: "Under the terms of the new agreement, 30 additional feet of exterior wall-space would be built so 'The Wall' can be installed higher, allowing for the building to advertise at street level and also protecting the work from damage. In exchange, the building owners have agreed to pay for all the artwork's restoration and maintenance costs. The sculpture would also be illuminated at night, for the first time ever." (Bragg, "High, Bright.")

<sup>24</sup> New York City Administrative Code Chapter 3-25-301 "Purpose and Declaration of Public Policy."



## Rise of Cultural Heritage Preservation

The prioritization of economic value in preservation vocalized by the LPC in its charges and displayed in the 2010 local designation extension is tangent to the larger historic preservation field's concentration in recent decades on coming to terms with matters of intangible cultural heritage. Numerous conferences and symposia have been convened on the matter, from the UNESCO's Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), to the Burra Charter (Australia, 1979, 1999), to the National Park Service's Preserving the Recent Past Conference (Chicago, 1995). In response to the evolution in preservation theory and advocacy, the National Park Service (NPS) updated its thematic categories used in evaluation for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listing and other designations.

While the LPC has persisted in evaluating interventions landmark districts such as SoHo according to traditional aesthetic values, as early as the late 1980s, residents, stakeholders, and even non-local journalism started to express concerns with the remarkable shift in the neighborhood character and the erosion of SoHo's identity as an urban, multigenerational, collaborative arts districts. Though the building facades remained intact and often in beautiful condition—successful traditional preservation—the very essence of SoHo, its cultural heritage, was at risk of slipping away.<sup>25</sup> Newspapers decried the beginning of the end for SoHo as an arts district, while public figures such as Manhattan Borough President Scott M Stringer directly cited the unfortunate neglect by the city of urban artists' needs and support of SoHo's art history:

They were artists, bohemians and squatters who stopped a plan in the 60s and 70s to tear up a downtown manufacturing zone...who thought there was something worth saving.... It is a tragic irony of Manhattan's success story that the people who made this island great, can now barely afford to live here.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that Stringer pointed his petition to the public of New York rather than the city itself or even preservationists implies the degree to which preservationists had stepped away from the matter.<sup>27</sup> Yet the professional preservation field remained immobilized.

<sup>25</sup> Please see: Chuck Twardy, "See SoHo Soon," *Orlando Sentinel* (17 Nov. 1991), H1.

David Osborne, "Last Stand for Bohemian SoHo," *The Independent* (London) (9 Apr. 1995), 14)  
Bloomberg News, "Art Enclave No Longer," *Newsday* (20 Mar, 2001), A45.

<sup>26</sup> Stringer's Inaugural Address at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on January 8, 2006. (Bernstein, Shapiro, and Mekas, *Illegal Living*, 249-251.)

<sup>27</sup> His plea stimulated some movement from the arts sector (some galleries returned), but this relocation has been tenuous at best. The majority of the gallerists have little faith in the private sector's ability to transform or preserve the arts nature of the neighborhood. Long-established SoHo art world figure Jeffrey Deitch advocates intervention from the city via "sensible urban planning" and measures to incentivize developers to dedicate space to non-profits and arts organizations. (Ibid, 251.)

The influx of hotel developments, the departure of the galleries (mainly to Chelsea), and the loss of well-known SoHo arts figures sparked nostalgia among certain arts-related institutions and gallerists. Even some gallerists that had departed the area during the nineties began to address aspects of the quickly disappearing presence of artists' SoHo. Galleries and museums launched a series of retrospectives honoring the memory of particular artists that had been represented by the galleries' namesake dealers, and in recent years a project at New York University worked to map out the studio locations of the artists of the early generations. However, these various attempts at a sort of memorialization concerned select individuals or aspects of the artists' SoHo in isolation from the collective landscape that had made the original SoHo so relevant to the aesthetic, cultural, and preservation movements of the late 1960s-early 1970s. Unlike Place Matters<sup>28</sup> or the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,<sup>29</sup> until recently the memory of the SoHo artists had no comprehensive interpretative platforms dedicated to the investigation and expression of their culture.

The rebirth of Donald Judd's 101 Spring Street home and studio as a house and arts museum will be a significant step in filling the void of the early artists in the present day SoHo landscape and discourse. Conceived by Judd in the late 1970s as a way to ensure the preservation of his philosophies and officially formed in 1996, the Judd Foundation works to preserve Judd's work and installations in Marfa and now at Spring Street. Although Donald Judd passed away in 1994, his former home at 101 Spring Street, now in the guardianship of the Judd Foundation, may prove to be future home for the memorialization not only of his own legacy but also that of the pioneering artists' SoHo. Because Judd himself was so rooted in his own philosophies of permanent installation and preservation (as well as the fact that he transferred his permanent residence to his compound in Marfa, Texas), 101 Spring Street largely maintained its 1960s-1970s form and character. In the years before his death, Judd began the process of assessing the material failures of his building's façade, though lack of the required finances prevented the work, but the fact that Judd owned the building provided a hope for its future reapplication.

Aided by inclusion of 101 Spring Street in 2001 to the inaugural class of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Historic Artists' Homes and Studios (HAHS), the Judd Foundation is currently

<sup>28</sup> A joint project of Lore and the Municipal Arts Society begun in 1998, PlaceMatters began as a way to identify, promote and protect through memory the "places [that] connect us to the past, host community and cultural traditions, and keep local environments distinctive." (<http://www.placematters.net>)

<sup>29</sup> Initially developed as a way to honor the cultural experience of America's immigrants, the museum has since augmented this study of culture with an exploration of the ways in which place shapes heritage. ([tenement.org](http://tenement.org))

working to make this hope a reality. The HAHS program was developed to create an advisory “consortium of thirty of America’s most significant artists’ spaces that are open to the public.”<sup>30</sup> Though the institutions behind the properties in the program have their respective foci and dedicated programs, all share a dedication to the perpetuation of the interests of their respective artists. The preservation of the physical integrity and character of the artists’ spaces is also incredibly important in order to help visitors to gain a broader perspective not only of the artists’ visions but also of the impact of environment on the artists and their work. The HAHS endows the National Trust with no regulatory power over the direction of the interpretation or conservation of the historic property, rather admission to the program assumes a certain level of adherence to preserving the memory of the persons involved. The benefits of HAHS membership come in the form of a small grant and membership in the National Trust’s Associate Sites program, “a national network of historic places grouped by theme and region, to encourage peer collaboration and professional development.”<sup>31</sup> The HAHS grant was applied to development of a master plan for 101 Spring Street. Physical restoration of the property has been ongoing since at least 2008, with a projected finish in later 2012 and reopening for public programming in 2013.<sup>32</sup>

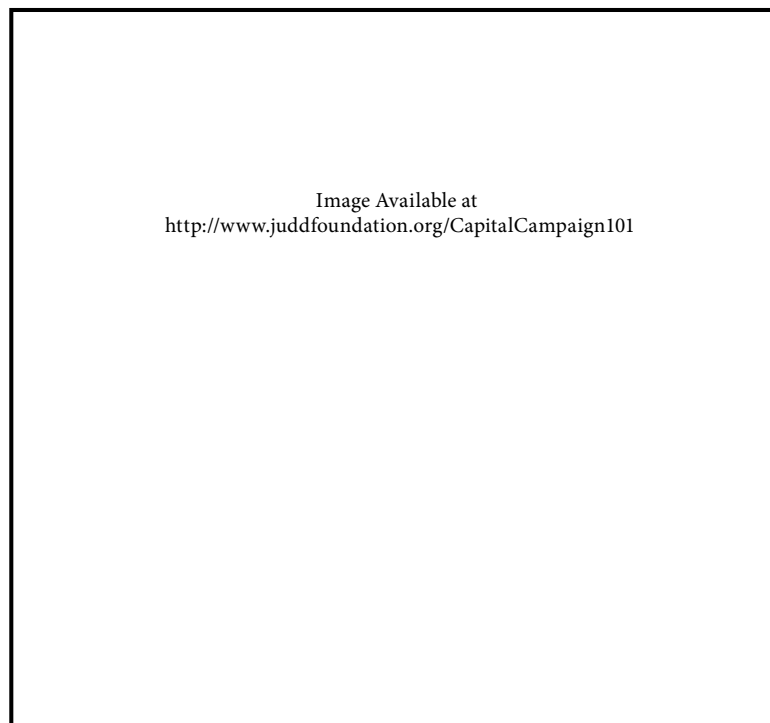


Figure 39. Exterior 101 Spring Street, SoHo, New York City.  
Judd Foundation.

30 “Historic Artists’ Homes and Studios,” National Trust for Preservation, Accessed 2 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/artists-homes.html>>

31 “Historic Artists’ Homes and Studios,” National Trust for Preservation.”

32 “Judd Foundation: 101 Spring St. Restoration,” Judd Foundation, Accessed 14 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.juddfoundation.org/restoration.htm>>

## Factors Hindering Preservation of Artist Communities' Cultural Heritage

Though Artists' SoHo has many qualities that make it uniquely significant in both the New York and national landscape, the historic dearth of efforts dedicated to the preservation of their cultural heritage correlates to circumstances facing many other urban artist communities. Several conditions consistently inhibit the ready and continued support by the preservation community of the importance of the cultural memory and heritage of the early SoHo artist community and are also representative of issues that are becoming increasingly prevalent in the memorialization of artist collectives across the national landscape.

Four impediments, in various degrees of control by the artists, preservationists, and the public, present the greatest obstacles to the memorialization of the SoHo artists' and other artist collectives across the national landscape:

- 1) Consideration of the artists as being part of the "recent past."
- 2) Adaptation of existing built fabric rather than new construction in historic districts, particularly problematic in the case of previous designation.
- 3) Domination and reconfiguring of the physical landscape by the subsequent generations and stigmas of artist-generated gentrification.
- 4) Anonymity of the self-promoted collective nature of the SoHo artists' community.

### Artist Communities as "Recent Past"

Concurrent with the rise of cultural heritage discourse in the preservation field has been discussion of the "recent past." Preservationists and citizens alike are increasingly finding significance in aspects of their or their parents' generation. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the recent past with respect to preservation is generally defined "as a moving window encompassing resources constructed or designed in the past 50 years."<sup>33</sup> The relative immaturity of such heritage artifacts places them directly at odds with the very foundation of the historic preservation movement: 101 Spring Street and Food were produced only within the past 40 years and were considerably younger during the first attempts to "preserve" SoHo. In 1995, the National Park Service held a conference dedicated to the

<sup>33</sup> "Modernism + Recent Past," National Trust for Historic Preservation, Accessed 7 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/saving-a-place/modernism-recent-past/>>

broaching these topics of preservation of the recent past. Conference presenters spoke to the necessary evolution in preservation methodology to address significant, though perhaps not significantly mature, cultural and architectural artifacts:

Until now, cultural resource professionals have relied on the passage of time to explain [an artifact's] significance and to tell us what elements of the past are worthy of preservation.... [However] time obliterates—often literally—as easily as it clarifies. With solid scholarship, the significance of much of the recent past can be put in historic perspective now.<sup>34</sup>

Though the a great deal of recent-past preservation concerns revolve around material conservation and theoretical consideration for modernist buildings, the vulnerability of more recent, culturally significant properties is also of great importance and concern for communities and preservationists alike. Preservation of the recent cultural past lays wide the shortcomings of “traditional” preservation strategies: as perfectly demonstrated by the early artists in SoHo, we as preservationists will find ourselves needing to address new history in old (previously designated, or even more simply, previously built) landscapes.

### **Reuse Rather than New Construction**

A major barrier to the perpetuation of the artists' memory lies in the artists' relatively construction-less approach to their activities in SoHo. Traditional preservation systems (such as that in New York City) prioritize the preservation of overt physical manifestations of long-established communities connected to the area's original development. However, the artists did not establish new construction in SoHo, and the much of their intervention occurred indoors and off of street level as the ground floors were still typically in the hands of the industries and also to avoid eviction.

The SoHo buildings secured designation with regards to their status as an exemplary assemblage of historic cast-iron buildings, and the acclimation is focused the original designers and builders of the structures. Alterations, unless successfully argued otherwise, are to adhere to the documentation of the building's original exterior likely the detriment of an artist's intervention. In this case, one might surmise that the pieces of the physical environment that reflect the artists' occupancy survive by virtue of either a pointed argument in favor of keeping the artist's intervention (such as the with the restoration of the

<sup>34</sup> Rebecca A. Shiffer, “The Recent Past,” *CRM*, Vol. 18: 8 (1995), 3.

Judd's 101 Spring Street) or a lack of need for LPC-involved upkeep. Consideration of the tremendous number of Certificates of Appropriateness that have passed before the LPC over the years leads one to wonder to what degree the early artists' presence could originally be felt in the physical environment and how many character defining features of the artist community are no longer extant. The resulting dearth of artist-instigated physical changes in the landscape further complicates the argument for their preservation in professional preservation circles, many of which continue to begin, as conventional preservation wisdom dictates, with the visible.

### Physical Effects and Cultural Implications of Gentrification

As exemplified by the SoHo case, one of the significant barriers to memorialization of artist communities in urban communities lies in the association of artists with gentrification. City planners understand the typically ensuing displacement as a potentially necessary, and even advantageous, side effect of district revitalization. Alternatively, community insiders and outsiders alike generally see the resulting changes as gentrification and the signal of the authentic neighborhood's end, though artist groups rarely move into an area as the economic superiors to the pre-existing community, if one exists, or with conscious intentions of beginning subsequent displacement.<sup>35</sup> Though gentrification unarguably followed their lead, the first generation artists of SoHo do not technically qualify as "gentrifiers" as they did not participate in the displacement of a preceding population: they occupied abandoned, un-lettable units in a neighborhood that was, for all intents and purposes, doomed.<sup>36</sup> Due to the nature of the first generation of artists' own displacement and the "cleaning up" of the neighborhood, what physical changes that were contributed by the artists—which were typically meant to be temporary—often fall the victims of renovations and improvements. In short, the artists can be so successful in ingenuity and approach to the existing environment that while they have a profound effect on the physical and cultural environment of the areas they inhabit, they effectively facilitate their own erasure.

<sup>35</sup> Because the numbers were relatively small and not overwhelming to the neighborhood, the district was able to achieve a sort of equilibrium. The gentrification truly began after the neighborhood's survival was secured by the defeat of LOMEX and the district's landmark designation. The ensuing invasion of the district—displacing pioneering artists as well as industries—in the mid-1970s and after presents a textbook demonstration of gentrification of the sociological invasion/succession vein. (Hudson, *The Unanticipated City*, 121.)

<sup>36</sup> Please refer to discussion of the SoHo Effect in Chapter 1..

## Collective Identity

Though an aspect that would seem to act in favor of promoting the preservation of the artists' memory and role in cultural heritage, the collective identity projected by the artists themselves has weakened their modern-day preservation. There is anonymity as well as strength in numbers especially in the art world. While the district is, even today, referred to as "an artists colony," the discussion of this aspect of the history is often rather brief. SoHo as the artists' community has rarely been the focus of discourse but rather provides context for discussion of a particular person or as a brief preface to the now-gentrified neighborhood:

It is also very much a product of the art world's particular kind of memory, of the need to for a celebrated artist like Gordon Matta-Clark...on which to hand an otherwise obscure, hard-to-categorize project like Food.<sup>37</sup>

Essentially, like Food, the artists' SoHo has too often become a piece of someone's (or the district's own) resume. The artists' strength-in-numbers served to make them relevant but also created an anonymity.

Another aspect of collective identity that promotes cohesion of the group yet hinders preservation of their heritage is the fact that artist communities such as that of SoHo require very little from the "outside" world. Interest in holistic and creative living as well as a diversity of ages, backgrounds, and talents allows for the talents of one to supplement or compliment the talents of another. Most importantly, the live-work nature of their occupancy lessens the need for individuals to depart from the system. However, infiltrators who do not necessarily share the same values or sensibilities can disrupt the system. The ease with which the equilibrium can be upset in artist communities often results in transience, preventing the establishment of ties to place that evolve over time (but are exhibited by their heirs, if they remain). Because so often artist communities have not had the opportunity to develop such an intrinsic tie to site and structure, the subsequent or longer-established stakeholder groups may argue against the artist community's right to representation in the neighborhood's narrative. Yet, just as with communities that occurred in the recent past, or intervened in the landscape through artful reuse rather than new construction, or prompted the revitalization of the area to the degree of causing displacement, artist com-

<sup>37</sup> Waxman. "The Banquet Years: FOOD," 31

munities, communities that effected change through their collective strength rather than a single famous native have every right to be considered as a significant component to the cumulative history of the area.



# Preservation Opportunities

## A Compromise of Tradition and Innovation

The onus of preserving artists in social memory by and large has fallen to the artists, citizens, and non-profit organizations, which have only truly picked up activity in the past decade. Some of these initiatives, particularly those led by the non-profits, have been able to take advantage of formal funding and recognition through national arts- and preservation-related grants and programs. The restoration of Donald Judd's 101 Spring Street and the Judd Foundation's programmatic agenda have potential to promote the memorialization of cultural heritage that has, up to the point, been neglected on a publically-relevant scale. But citizens with a vested interest in early artists' era and the hindsight of a generation have recently taken up the cause to perpetuate the memory of the early Artists' SoHo.

The SoHo Memory Project, a digital repository of collected memories, launched on January 1, 2011, by SoHo native and current resident Yukie Ohta, is dedicated to perpetuating the memory of the community of the early artists' era through the currently internet-blog trend. Publicly accessible digital archiving of social memory and cultural heritage dramatically increased in the first decade of the 2000s, as citizens realized their own agency to contribute to the cultural discourse and began to utilize the internet to proliferate concerns relevant to them. Born, raised, and now living in one of the lofts in which she grew up (on Mercer Street), Ohta strives to show the "real" SoHo community of that time through her own personal stories as well as a multitude of guest posts from other residents and first-hand accounts. Prompted by feeling that the collective memory of SoHo was quickly fading, the SoHo Memory Project works to show both the subjective and objective aspects of the history of SoHo in the effort to show a more complete picture of the true SoHo artist community, both artists and non-artists. Ohta's recognition that the SoHo of the late 1960s and 1970s arose through a unique confluence of circumstances motivates her pursuit of providing a forum to demonstrate the points of intersection that enabled it to be pivotal in its influence on lifestyle, eating culture, art, and urban community.

If preservationists are to craft legislation and practice that works to preserve intangible aspects of heritage through traditional (tangible) means, citizens and professionals must learn to gain perspective on the recent past before it is lost. Increasingly, one of the key tools for collecting memories of the past and present is online blogger-culture. Blogs such as the [sohomemory.com](http://sohomemory.com) offer a myriad of opportunities

for the public compilation, diffusion, and perpetuation of memory, but the first-hand nature and subjectivity of the stories complicate formalized recognition of these types of initiatives. Blogs and repositories such as Ohta's are important due to their ready public accessibility, and as long as the content is curated to weed out sham posts, such forums can be instrumental in securing broader societal relevance of a subject. Connection between blogs-type projects and official preservation efforts will also help to link the disparate elements of memory and history, thus providing strength through a united front. However, if the SoHo artists' story itself provides the caveat of linking the grassroots with the mainstream or governmental: regulation and standards lend legitimacy but could handicap the organic and self-motivated process (see the discussion of Food and 112 Greene Street). Nevertheless, the relevancy of these "civilian-driven" projects in the perpetuation of social memory should not be discounted from the greater cultural heritage discourse.

### **Utilizing the Current Preservation Toolkit**

The next few years offer the perfect opportunity to recapture and proliferate public knowledge of the pervasive significance of the early SoHo artist community. At the heart of any memorialization discourse is the desire to prevent demolition by neglect at both the physical and at the cultural level. Applying the current preservation systems, among the most effective strategies to avert this oversight is the utilization of the strengths of preservation legislations through revision of the various district designations to reflect both the physical and cultural significance of the district as begun by this report. Through this process of investigation into both the cultural importance of the past as well as the extant physical remnants of that past in the present, relevant pieces of the landscape may be identified and documented before being lost for good. Efforts to revise the historic district's designation on both the local and federal level should begin immediately and in support of each other, as the investigations necessary for one application should prove to be beneficial to the other.

The revision of the designation report for the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District at the local level would be instrumental in preserving the remainders of the artist community's physical landscape and opening avenues for future aid and participation on behalf of the city. Revision of the LPC designation would also serve the purpose of raising awareness of the ever-shrinking social memory and physi-

cal presence of the artists on the larger public scale. While on the one hand, the recent extension to the district would appear to impair attempts for revised designation, the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District is a separate designation from, though inherently connected to, the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District. This report has chosen to present the Extension designation as a sort of revision to the original Historic District designation because the ideas and history presented in the Extension designation present the evolution of the city's cultural and preservation values with regards to the district. The significance presented in the Extension report is the one that will be proliferated and remembered. Yet the original designation survives with its optimism intact and thus provides the perfect jumping off point from which to complete the story of the artist community in SoHo.

The ability to illustrate not only through documentation of cultural evolution and influence but also through the physical environment in SoHo itself will serve well for the application to revise the municipal regulation, as the LPC is by and large a commission focused on the practice of traditional, concrete preservation. Although the commission has made recent efforts to include through designation culturally though not necessarily aesthetically relevant sites, the very framework of the commission is structured to achieve the ends of traditional preservation.<sup>38</sup> Beyond serving merely strategic ends, the collection of contributing “structures” to the physical landscape of the artists may then be integrated into the designation seamlessly as the important components of the pervasive landscape (as they are unofficially known to be). If, as stated in both LPC designation reports that address the district, one of the great strengths of the SoHo streetscape lies in its visual cohesion, it is important to illustrate how the artists are an integral, though sometimes subtle, subtext of that complete landscape: in a sense, the artist community is a “contributing structure” to the SoHo district without which the reading of the entire district would take an altogether different form.

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) designation must also be revised to reflect the importance of the SoHo artists' community. Though largely honorary, the NRHP is yet important as “the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation [and] part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic

<sup>38</sup> The Commission has been loathe over the years to designate districts based on cultural significance, such as those associated with the working class or the everyday Manhattanite (i.e. East Harlem, the Lower East Side) unless such districts demonstrate, as in the case of SoHo, supported by exemplary architectural importance.

and archeological resources.”<sup>39</sup> Technically, as the buildings of SoHo are already part of a recognized Historic District, the benefits of listing in the National Register are already active and the memory of the district is cemented in the national repository. The current designation, however, has no mention of the artist community except mention as part of the then-burgeoning developmental activities in the district. The negation of the artists from the NRHP SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District thus essentially ignores the importance of the artists on the national level. As a result, institutions related to the SoHo artist community (unlike the individually recognized Judd Foundation) is kept from important opportunities for acknowledgment as a destination for arts-tourism and education as well as grants targeted at the curatorial management and memorialization of the cultural landscape and the rituals inherent within that landscape. SoHo’s status as a landscape rather than a collection of discretely portable objects necessitates its treatment on a scale beyond simply the Judd Foundation. Though it may be admirably addressed through a museum’s interpretive program, SoHo as district, community, or otherwise, cannot itself be placed within a museum without being dismantled. In order to properly memorialize the artist community, traces of its presence must be allowed to remain in situ, so that, like the art objects they developed, the artists’ SoHo may be understood as a pervasive environment to the degree that it continues to exist.

The National Park Service (NPS) would likely be receptive to the idea of reevaluation of the NRHP significance of the early artists’ SoHo due to the department’s mission and responsibility to reflect “the full diversity of American history and prehistory [in] the NPS’s identification and interpretation of historic properties.”<sup>40</sup> In 1994, the NPS released a revised and expanded thematic framework to guide the NPS in evaluation of significance of resources for listing or designation to the NRHP, NHL, or the National Park System. The further aim of this adjustment was to assess and ensure the quality not only of new listings and designations but also of the representation of these expanded themes in previously designated properties and sites within the national preservation system. With the establishment of eight categories for consideration, the NPS intended to better inform interpretation programs and accomplish

39 “National Register of Historic Places Fundamentals,” National Park Service, Accessed 12 Mar. 2012. <[http://www.nps.gov/nr/national\\_register\\_fundamentals.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/national_register_fundamentals.htm)>

40 “Revision of the National Park Service’s Thematic Framework, 1994,” National Park Service, Accessed 12 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.nps.gov/history/history/categories/thematic.htm>>

a more comprehensive understanding of the nation's cultural heritage through a broader historical scope and more nuanced understanding of the layers of human experience:

The diagram [illustrating the framework] reflects how scholarship is dramatically changing the way we look at the past, reconstructing it as an integrated, diverse, complex human experience [including] the reality of interrelationships.<sup>41</sup>

Preliminary application of the thematic framework by this author reveals that the early SoHo artists' community demonstrates significant relevancy in as many as five of the eight categories.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the district is approaching the appropriate lapse of time for NRHP eligibility.<sup>43</sup> Listing on the NRHP would not only increase opportunities for funding, research, and inclusion in thematic tourism but would also provide opportunities for visible, on site recognition, through the (voluntary) Bronze Plaque Program at sites of importance. Still, utilization of programs such as the National Register, municipal designation, and memory repositories will only prove to be useful if in the future preservationists learn from the events of the past and commit to the advocacy efforts through the active pursuit of the maintenance of cultural heritage memorialization as well as that of the built environment.

## Revising and Augmenting the Preservation Toolkit

Akin to the once-cutting edge cast iron architecture of SoHo, preservation frameworks like that of the LPC that firmly adhere to traditional preservation strategies are becoming increasingly outdated and unable to properly address current societal and community values. The status of municipal preservation is not without merit, and the traditional preservation system may still be applied with confidence to a great deal of the preservation concerns that arise in the current landscape. With the rise in concern for cultural heritage memorialization and the growing prevalence for heritage of the recent past to gain significance within protected historic landscapes, the conflict between official and unofficial assertions

<sup>41</sup> The eight thematic categories are: Peopling Places, Developing the American Economy, Expanding Science and Technology, Transforming the Environment, Creating Social Institutions and Movements, Expressing Cultural Values, Changing Role of the US in the world, Shaping the Political Landscape. " ("Revision of the National Park Service's Thematic Framework, 1994.")

<sup>42</sup> See appendix for explanation.

<sup>43</sup> In order to be considered eligible for NRHP listing, the cultural artifact must have been constructed and/or come of significance at least fifty years prior to nomination. However, this criterion may be disregarded in cases where the nominated artifact is deemed to be of exceptional importance. The level of significance that can be attributed to the early SoHo artist community through application of the revised thematic framework should be able to overcome the fifty-year rule.

of importance such as that witnessed in SoHo will only grow more regular in occurrence. Consequently, local and state preservation commissions should investigate how they might amend their current operational theories, such as through the revision of assessment criteria to include thematic systems of evaluation or the periodic re-assessment of existing designations, to better assess the relevancy of existing designations as well as to accommodate future value-based nominations. A more investigatory, systematized, and illustrative structure in the vein of the NPS's updated thematic categories will facilitate the comprehensive understanding of the artifact's layers of significance and help to prevent the exclusion of this relevant group of stakeholders. Furthermore, calling attention to the points of conflict between various assertions of significance will provide opportunities for proactive preservation planning discourse. Such a system would allow for the accommodation of both cultural and physical heritage artifacts without overtly prioritizing the traditional preservation values.

Designation of a cultural heritage artifact (be it a site, a district, or a cultural event) is perhaps the most important advocacy tool in the American preservation field. In his article "Fixing Historic Preservation: A Constructive Critique of Significance," Randall Mason investigates why designation approaches rooted in traditional concepts of significance are inadequate in the current social and cultural climate:

In significance, preservationists pack all their theory, ideology and politics.... A 'statement of significance' gathers together all the reasons why a building or place should be preserved, why it is meaningful or useful, and what aspects require most urgent protection. Once defined, significance is used as a basis for policy, planning, and design decisions.<sup>44</sup>

The problems of the current and past fields' notions of significance lies in the fact because determination of significance is based on the value system of the current society, the very nature of significance is contingent. This fact becomes an issue because while the values of a society are arbitrary and subject to fluctuation, judgments concerning significance are largely fixed in place once approved. As a result, the importance of a cultural artifact becomes linear, rather than cumulative; time appears to have been stopped. As Mason discusses and SoHo demonstrates, there are multiple layers of meaning wrapped up in a place or thing, and often these various significances come into conflict. The values of society have shifted to a desire for greater representation of intangible or ephemeral aspects of cultural heritage in preservation discourse and regulatory efforts.

<sup>44</sup> Randall Mason, "Fixing Historic Preservation: A Constructive Critique of 'Significance,'" *Places*, Vol. 16:1 (2004), 64.

The preservationist's tool of designation need not be dispensed with but must necessarily be revised and augmented in order to reflect and better address these concerns of the memorialization of cultural heritage. A few suggestions for change in designation policy:

- 1) In recognition of such changes in scholarship and societal value, the new NPS thematic framework could be incorporated into the current New York City LPC evaluation process to better reflect the wide range of classification of significance and to allow for the multiple layers of significance that a district such as SoHo is likely to possess.
- 2) Periodic re-evaluation and re-assessment of preservation narratives to ensure that the nascent developments that demonstrate potential for future importance (such as the zoning innovations inspired by artists and the artists themselves) are not lost on account of being "the recent past."
- 3) Particularly for historic districts, the formation of dedicated neighborhood/district units either as a result of or a requirement for designation. Washington DC requires the establishment of neighborhood organizations for all historic districts. Re-evaluation efforts could be led by such organizations in order to take some of the burden off of the city commission.
- 4) In cases when the argument for significance is more intangible or culturally based, oral histories, interviews, or cultural surveys should be incorporated directly into the designation documentation in order to more directly address cultural concerns. These observations and anecdotes should represent a variety of stakeholders, particularly those that have been associated with the area the longest.

In order to achieve the successful perpetuation of the social memory of the artists' SoHo or any other cultural stakeholder group, responsibility must be shared at all tiers of the preservation community, from civilian to federal. Certain mechanisms promoting preservation of the SoHo artists in social memory are already in place, but they must be utilized in an active rather than passive manner in order to affect a resurgence and solidification of the public's memory. Non-profit organizations serve to advocate for the innumerable concerns of society that the limited manpower of the city cannot possibly be expected to keep up with on their own. The preservation of and proliferation of knowledge of socio-cultural memory and heritage is a concern for the city, state, and nation and a legitimate part of public policy. Thus the burden of responsibility should not simply fall on the public and the scope of the artifacts considered of importance should not be limited by that which is physically extant. In light of the recent resurgence of interest in recapturing the memory of the SoHo artists' community, there is hope to substantially revive social memory of early artists through a comprehensive approach involving not only the non-profits and citizens but also the various preservation apparati of local, state, and federal government.

## Chapter Conclusions

The story of the SoHo artist community demonstrates the externalities that can accompany success within the preservation system that emphasizes the retention of physical integrity. SoHo's cast-iron legacy has been preserved successfully but with the result that memory of the early artist community has been allowed to dissipate along with its members from the public's cultural memory and SoHo's physical landscape. The need to develop methods for addressing the application of new layers of significance resulting tensions that might arise is particularly pressing as the regulatory preservation system ages and the designations mature, as exemplified in the case of SoHo. Discussion of the preservation field's activities in SoHo also brings to light the particular difficulties experienced by artist communities in achieving recognition for contributions to cultural heritage. The issues reviewed in this chapter (the recent past, reuse rather than redevelopment, gentrification, and collective identity) with regards to artist communities are also relevant to the larger preservation field discourse as conditions that are growing increasingly prevalent in the modern era and the way that preservation practice is evolving.

Revision to historic preservation policy is becoming an ever-increasing necessity and should be a priority of the preservation field, though alteration should not be made merely for the sake of change. The four suggestions for how designation policy might be augmented are intended to provoke thought and discussion for how to make historic preservation better able to function within increasingly complex physical, cultural, and governmental systems. Though preservation is nominally a field focused on the past, the intention is to always be looking to the future.



# Thesis Conclusions

Although preservation efforts have succeeded in keeping the historic cast-iron fabric of SoHo largely intact, the contributions, whether tangible or intangible, of the early SoHo artist community have received little attention and continue to slip away. Advocacy should not attempt to recreate or perpetuate the past, but nostalgia among a select few will not suffice to raise broad awareness of the artists' cultural heritage. Advocates must develop and utilize knowledge of the remaining tangible connections to the past artist generation as an avenue through which to pursue the broader acknowledgement of the SoHo artist community's significant contributions to local and national cultural and aesthetic heritage. The foundational requirement within traditional preservation frameworks to prioritize physical integrity according to a particular period of significance, and to do so in perpetuity, has created a preservation system inherently at odds with itself as landscapes have become increasingly layered with regards to physical structures as well as cultural identities.

While the number of activities dedicated to Artists' SoHo memory has increased over recent years, the lack of coordination of events and consistency in focus has undermined the broad-scale effectiveness of the initiatives. In order for future memorialization efforts to succeed, there must be a concentrated, overt effort at collaboration at all levels of advocacy and a commitment to the maintenance of the preservation narrative's relevancy for later generations in addition to the conservation of the physical remnants of cultural heritage. As the SoHo case illustrates, the struggle for acknowledgement of unofficial significance in previously designated districts will require action on behalf of both advocates and regulatory organizations in order to develop a more effective framework attuned to the realities and values of present-day heritage preservation.

Initiatives such as art retrospectives, walking tours retracing the steps of the artists, the Judd Foundation, and the SoHo Memory Project provide promising avenues for the reclamation of memory on a larger public scale. But nostalgia and isolated institutional support will be able to effect broader change. Foremost, the official preservation narratives should be amended to reflect the demonstrable significance of the early artist community. Altering the documentation will ensure protection for the remaining expressions of the artists in the landscape, such as the George Maciunas' Ailanthus trees, Bill Tarr's 102 Greene Street door, and Donald Judd's 101 Spring Street, and will also increase opportunities

for support and stabilization to the private and institutional groups advocating on behalf of the artists. As important as Donald Judd was and is to the SoHo artist community, 101 Spring Street should not be the only representation of the community in the National Register and National Trust systems. Even so, the Judd Foundation's restoration and reopening of 101 Spring Street as a museum presents great possibilities not only through the interpretive programs that will be offered through the museum but also as a hub through which a network of collaboration can grow.

Another key step that should be taken in moving forward the memorialization of the artist community's cultural heritage is the development of communication between the various stakeholder, advocacy, and preservationist groups. Only through collaborative, coordinated public education programs will the broadening of awareness be accomplished on a publically relevant scale. Just as the trifecta of Jane Jacobs, Margot Gayle, and the artist community played to each others' strengths in the LOMEX opposition, so too should current advocates campaign utilize the talents of one another to achieve truly palpable results. Common, proven programs such as walking tours, symposia, and performances and exhibitions will bring the public into contact with the work, stories, and landscapes of the artist community. Oral histories and interviews pertaining to the experience of living in the early artist community should also be undertaken in both formalized settings, such as through the Columbia Center for Oral History, as well as more informal but still invaluable fora such as the SoHo Memory Project blog. The objective of these initiatives is to connect the past to the present and memory to the landscape so that the heritage may be documented and disseminated.

The intent of this critical study of the narrative of preservation in SoHo is to inspire the responsible stewardship of the cultural heritage of the early artist community in the realm of memory and in the physical environment of SoHo. Another objective is to raise awareness that SoHo also embodies concerns beyond its district boundaries. The belittling of the early artists' SoHo provides but one example of a community whose cultural and physical heritage has been overlooked due to factors (often) beyond its control and calls attention to the particular vulnerability of artist communities to fall victim to such neglect (typically in the very landscapes that they helped to revive). While much of the physical landscape of the early artists has indeed been irrevocably deprived of its authentic character, preservation of the community's memory and cultural heritage is not a lost cause.



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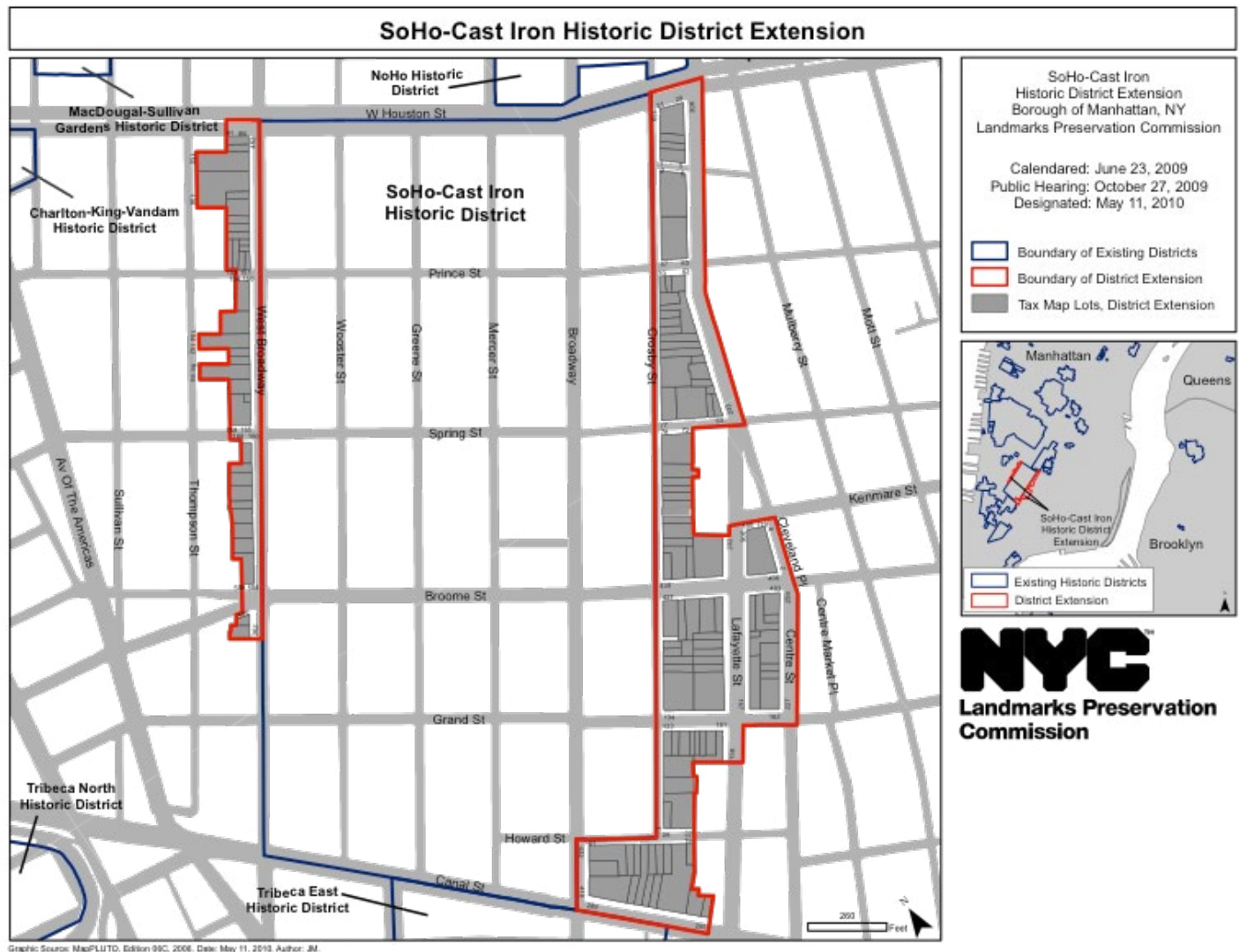
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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Map of SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Boundaries

(Map from 2010 SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension Report, Landmarks Preservation Commission)



## Appendix B: SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Report (LPC, 1973) Excerpts

### BOUNDARIES AND INTRODUCTION

The SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District in lower Manhattan is nearly rectangular in shape and is bounded by Canal Street, Broadway, Howard Street, Crosby Street, East Houston Street, West Houston Street and West Broadway. It consists of 26 city blocks and contains about 500 buildings.

The hyphenated name, "SoHo-Cast Iron" was chosen for the designation of New York City's twenty-third Historic District in order to suggest some of the diversity of the area. The "Cast Iron" portion of the name refers to the unique collection of cast-iron structures located within the District. "SoHo," meaning "South of Houston," is the acronym adopted by a group of artists who moved, in the 1960s, into what then seemed to be a doomed neighborhood. They have given it a new life, making feasible the preservation of an irreplaceable part of our cultural heritage. The use of the double name is also intended to suggest that, even architecturally, the District contains more than just cast-iron buildings, important though they are. Indeed, the District contains some of the City's most interesting extant examples of brick, stone and mixed iron-and-masonry commercial construction of the post-Civil War period.

The body of this designation report is divided into three parts:

Part I discusses the social and economic history and the architectural development of the area, and provides background information on the use of cast iron as a building material and its application to architectural forms. Through this analysis, the following factors relating to the unique significance of the District are emphasized:

- (1) The social, cultural and economic history of the District has been, and is again becoming, as varied and colorful as any to be found in New York City.
- (2) The illustration it provides of 19th-century commercial architectural styles is probably as complete, well documented and geographically compact as any to be found in the United States.
- (3) The collection of well preserved cast-iron structures, now unrivalled in the world, demonstrates how cast iron was used in 19th-century commercial construction. It also illustrates in a tangible way all sides of a great aesthetic debate. Some of the more thoughtful 19th-century theorists hoped, through a synthesis between engineering and architecture, to develop a truly representative contemporary style.

In Part II the thirteen streets that either border or run through the District are arranged alphabetically and discussed block by block. In each case there is an introductory section describing the general character of the block in question with detailed descriptions of buildings of particular interest, followed by a tabular listing of all the pertinent information known about each structure in the block.

Part III contains appendices, sources and credits, bibliography as well as the findings of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.



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With the end of the 19th Century came an end to speculative interest and growth in the area. The center of the City had long since moved northward and with it the prominent businesses soon followed. Marginal industries, such as dealers in textile and paper wastes, small apparel firms that produced underwear and standard design women's clothing, that did not change with the fashions, filled the vacancies left by the older businesses. (35)

#### Decay and Rebirth -- Artists and Industry

For the next sixty years, the District lay unchanged and forgotten by the City in a limbo of small industrial and commercial enterprises. It was not until the 1960s that a new movement began to stir. This, surprisingly enough, was caused by the trend among artists to paint on larger and larger canvasses. The high-ceilinged, empty lofts of SoHo provided the large spaces that they needed for their work and the rents were very low. With the help of City agencies, the zoning laws were imaginatively amended to permit the migration of artists into the area without, at the same time, driving out the marginal industries whose employment of thousands of semi-skilled workers fills a necessary niche in the City's economy. The result has been that the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District is fast becoming one of the most important creative centers of contemporary art in the nation. At the same time, the innovative zoning provisions are demonstrating how, with appropriate provisions for health and safety, manufacturing, commercial and certain residential uses can exist side-by-side. If the demonstration continues to succeed as it has during the past few years, SoHo may well provide a wider lesson. With a little imagination, effort and ingenuity, exciting alternatives to demolition can be found for the stagnant and decaying areas of our cities. These alternatives have the further advantage, which "slum clearance" lacks, of preserving the continuity of a city's cultural and historic heritage -- in the case of the SoHo-Cast Iron District, the preservation of a unique concentration of structures of great historic significance.

(8)

## Appendix C:

### SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension Report (2010) Excerpts

#### SUMMARY

The SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension consists of approximately 135 properties located on the blocks immediately adjacent to the east and west sides of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District. Many of the buildings date from the same period of development as those in the previously-designated historic district and exhibit similar architectural characteristics. There are several cast-iron-fronted buildings within the extension as well a large number of similarly-styled masonry buildings. The SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension consists of two subsections. The larger eastern section encompasses all of the eastern side of Crosby Street and portions of Lafayette, Howard, and Centre Streets, while the smaller western section includes buildings on the western side of West Broadway, some of which go through the block to the east side of Thompson Street. The boundaries of the extension were drawn so as to protect cohesive streetscapes along narrow Crosby Street and Howard Street as well as a number of notable cast-iron buildings on West Broadway.

Like their counterparts in the designated district, many of the structures within the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Extension were erected in the post-Civil War era as store and loft buildings for the wholesale dry goods merchants and the manufacturing businesses that transformed the once comfortable residential neighborhood into a bustling commercial zone in the mid- and late-nineteenth century. The extension displays a variety of architectural styles also present in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, including Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne, as well as the Romanesque and Renaissance Revival styles. In many instances, these buildings were designed by the same prominent architects as those within the previously-designated district: Robert Mook (386-388 West Broadway, built 1871), Italianate style; D. & J. Jardine (28 Howard Street, built 1872, Italianate style), Detlef Lienau (22-26 Howard Street, built 1864-65, neo-Grec style), Renwick & Sands (29 Howard Street, built 1868, neo-Grec style), Samuel A. Warner (428-432 Broadway, built 1888-89, Queen Anne style), George F. Pelham (137-139 Grand Street, built 1911, neo-Classical style), Isaac F. Duckworth (428 Broome Street, built 1868-69, Italianate style), Griffith Thomas (426 Broome Street, built 1869, Italianate style; 419-421 Broome Street, built 1873, Italianate style), Henry Engelbert (424-426 Broadway, built 1868, Italianate style), John H. Whitenack (392-394 West Broadway, built 1872, Italianate style; 422 West Broadway, built 1873-74, Italianate style), and John B. Snook (158-164 Lafayette Street, built 1889-90, Queen Anne style). Other prominent architects and firms whose work is found in the proposed extension include Edward H. Kendall (425-427 Broome Street, built 1874), DeLemos & Cordes (241-249 Centre Street, built 1888-91, Romanesque Revival style; 403-405 Broome Street, built 1890-91, Renaissance Revival style), Albert Buchman (292-296 Lafayette Street, 1897 alteration, Renaissance Revival style), Charles Haight (275 Canal Street, built 1878, Queen Anne style), William Field & Son (134-140 Grand Street, built 1869, Second Empire style), John R. Thomas (278-290 Lafayette Street, built 1891-92 and 1898-99, neo-Grec style), Schneider & Herter (67-73 Spring Street, built 1889-90, Queen Anne style), and Oscar S. Teale (468-472 West Broadway, built 1885, Romanesque Revival style). A number of early residential buildings, dating to the early to mid-nineteenth century, have survived, such as the Federal style houses at 68 and 70 Prince Street, and 133 Grand Street, as well as Greek Revival style houses at 151-157 Prince Street, 19 Howard Street, 33 Howard Street, and 253 Centre Street.

The buildings in the SoHo-Cast-Iron Historic Extension have been occupied by a variety of commercial entities ranging from manufacturers of textiles and clothing in the mid-to-late

nineteenth century to drug wholesalers, toy manufacturers, and electrical and hardware suppliers in the early twentieth century, and paper warehouses and electronics fabricators in the mid-twentieth century. A major change in the type of occupancy occurred after World War Two. As the textile industry began to relocate to the southern United States and then, ultimately, to overseas destinations in search of cheaper labor, many printing plants and “dead storage” warehouses moved into SoHo’s large interior spaces. Many loft buildings were razed and replaced with gas stations, auto repair shops, parking lots, and one-story garages and car washes, producing many somewhat mottled streetscapes. By the late 1950s, the SoHo area was widely considered to be a depressed commercial slum known as “hell’s hundred acres.” But, by the 1960s, an up-and-coming generation of artists discovered large, high-ceilinged, and inexpensive spaces within lofts buildings of SoHo. Vacant warehouses and lofts were converted into studios, galleries and, often illegally, living quarters. The city amended zoning laws in 1971 to permit the movement of artists into the area while preserving the remaining businesses that still employed hundreds of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. For a time, the SoHo area was one of the most important creative centers of contemporary art in the nation. Among some of the notable artists and galleries located in the historic district extension were Keith Haring the A.I.R. Gallery, which was the city’s oldest women’s art cooperative, Leo Castelli, Heana Sonnabend, John Weber, Andre Emmerich, Charles Cowles, Mary Boone, and Frank Gehry.

The threat of further demolition and large-scale redevelopment subsided greatly when the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District in 1973; the action protected about 500 buildings on 25 city blocks. By 1978, an estimated five thousand artists were living in SoHo; but around that time, rents and real estate values began a precipitous climb. The area was becoming more fashionable as a residential and commercial address, and many of the artists who had revitalized the once-neglected district were priced out of the gentrifying neighborhood. Upscale boutiques, galleries, restaurants, bars, clubs, hotels, and shops replaced studios and galleries, and most of the remaining small industrial businesses. Many new commercial buildings were constructed in the last two decades of the twentieth century on lots that had been vacant for decades. Late-twentieth-century development trends have continued and even accelerated in the early twenty-first century. Additional new buildings were constructed on many of the empty lots, and several buildings were increased in height.

Today, the SoHo-Cast-Iron Historic District Extension still maintains the essence of its early industrial history, even as it continues to evolve into one of New York City’s most attractive and popular residential neighborhoods and shopping destinations.

in the early twentieth century, and paper warehouses and electronics fabricators in the mid-twentieth century. A number of firms that would later become nationally prominent had an early presence in the historic district extension. The Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company, carriage makers, occupied 261-267 Canal Street in the 1890s. The company later grew to become one of the country's largest producers of automobiles in the twentieth century. Philip Morris & Co. was located at 402-404 West Broadway around 1910. The company was one of the major producers of cigarettes and tobacco products. F.W. Woolworth had a store at 424-426 Broadway in the 1920s. The American Express Co. operated a large facility at 406-412 Broome Street from 1901 to 1919.

A major change in the type of occupancy occurred after World War Two. As the textile industry began to relocate to the southern United States and then, ultimately, to overseas destinations in search of cheap labor, many printing plants and "dead storage" warehouses moved into SoHo's large interior spaces.<sup>37</sup> The vacancy rate in the mid-1950s was over fifteen percent, rents had dropped to less than fifty cents per square foot, and many spaces could be had for less than \$100 per month. In one year from 1962 to 1963, the number of business establishments in the SoHo area declines from 651 to 459 and the number of workers employed from 12,671 to 8,394. Nevertheless, some manufacturing uses continued to thrive among the empty lofts and dead storage warehouses, such as the Zenith Electric Company, which produced the first portable radio in 1923, but later went on to be one of the largest producers of television sets and the inventors of electronic equipment. Its plant was located at 292-296 Lafayette Street in the 1940s and 50s. Also, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters had its headquarters and meeting hall at 418 and 428 Broadway from the 1940s through the 1960s, attesting to the continuing industrial prominence of the SoHo area.

By the late 1950s, the SoHo area was widely considered to be a depressed commercial slum known as "hell's hundred acres." But, by the 1960s an up-and-coming generation of artists discovered large, high-ceilinged, and inexpensive spaces within lofts buildings of SoHo, which had many vacancies as many industries moved to better-suited buildings in nearby suburbs and beyond. Vacant warehouses and lofts were converted into studios, galleries and, often illegally, living quarters. The city government amended zoning laws in 1971 to permit the movement of artists into the area without driving out the remaining industries that still employed hundreds of semi-skilled workers. For a time, the SoHo area was one of the most important creative centers of contemporary art in the nation. Among some of the notable artists and galleries located in the historic district extension were Frank Gehry's studio at 55 Crosby Street, Keith Haring at 292-296 Lafayette Street, and the A.I.R. Gallery, which was the city's oldest women's art cooperative, which was at 61-63 Crosby Street. The loft building at 420 West Broadway was the "weightiest building of all, artwise."<sup>38</sup> It held the galleries of Leo Castelli, Ileana Sonnabend, John Weber, Andre Emmerich, Charles Cowles and Mary Boone. In 1973, Trisha Brown's classic dance performance "Roof Piece" was performed on the roof of this building, while the audience watched it from nearby rooftops.<sup>39</sup> The threat of further demolition and large-scale redevelopment subsided greatly when the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District in 1973; the action protected about 500 buildings on 25 city blocks.

<sup>37</sup> The term "dead storage" refers to "long-term warehousing of bulky, inexpensive materials such as rag and wastepaper bales." Kostelanetz, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Kostelanetz, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80. In 2001, the galleries were displaced by luxury condominiums and a rooftop addition was built.

By 1978, an estimated five thousand artists were living in SoHo; but around that time, rents and real estate values began a precipitous climb. The area was rapidly becoming fashionable as a residential and commercial address, and many of the artists who had revitalized the once-neglected district were priced out of the gentrifying neighborhood.<sup>40</sup> Upscale boutiques, galleries, restaurants, bars, clubs, hotels, and shops drove out many artists and most of the remaining small industrial businesses. Many new commercial buildings constructed in the last two decades of the twentieth century on lots that had been vacant for decades. These include retail buildings at 382-384 West Broadway (1984), 430-434 West Broadway (1986), 454 West Broadway (1990), 452 West Broadway (1990-91), and 456 West Broadway (1993-94), as well as an office building at 413 Broome Street (aka 186-192 Lafayette Street), a five-story brick office building built in c.1999 for Sing Tao Newspapers, NY, Ltd., which replaced a one-story garage. The Sing Tao building reflects the growing influence of Asian immigrants to the economy of lower Manhattan and New York City in general.

#### The Early Twenty-first Century

Late-twentieth-century development trends continue and have even accelerated in the early twenty-first century. Additional new buildings were constructed on empty lots, and low buildings were increased in height. New construction during this period include an apartment and office building 51 Crosby Street (2004), an apartment building at 9-11 Crosby Street (2009-10), a restaurant at 62-66 Prince Street (aka 264 Lafayette Street) in 2004, retail buildings at 450 West Broadway (2000) and 372-374 West Broadway (2001), and a hotel at 79-85 Crosby Street (aka 246 Lafayette Street), which required the demolition of a brick, Queen Anne style nineteenth century building on Lafayette Street in 2008 for a below-grade entry plaza and dining pavilion. Today, the SoHo-Cast-Iron Historic District Extension retains the essence of its early industrial history, even as it continues to evolve into one of New York City's most attractive and popular residential neighborhoods and shopping destinations.

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<sup>40</sup> Joyce Gold, "SoHo," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 1088.

## Appendix D:

### SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District Report (NRHP, NHL, 1978) Excerpts

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A brief history of the district indicates that the SoHo district was the first free Black settlement on Manhattan Island. Agricultural at first, it later became a residential area until it was commercialized in the middle of the 19th century. Successively owned by the Dutch West India Company in the 17th century, the land passed to Nicholas Bayard. During the Revolution the area was fortified and as late as the first decade of the 19th century the area contained a cast-iron foundry and a tannery. In the early 1800's the marshy land was filled and residential development began--two early houses still stand--one at 107 Spring Street (1807) and the other at 129 Spring (1817). Some Federal houses on Spring Street and Canal Street remain from the residential boom that took place after the war of 1812. Between 1820 and 1850 it was stable, then began the change rapidly.

"The transformation at this time was due in no small part to the new development that had begun to alter Broadway. The decade of the 1850s saw the metamorphosis of Broadway from a street of small brick retail shops into a boulevard of marble, cast-iron and brownstone commercial palazzos. Lord & Taylor, Arnold Constable & Co., Tiffany & Co., E. V. Haughwout and others established their stores on or near Broadway. Major hotels joined them: the Union Hotel, the City Hotel, the Prescott House, the Metropolitan and the magnificent St. Nicholas Hotel. The famous music halls and theaters soon opened: Brougham's Lyceum, the Chinese Rooms, Buckley's Minstrel Hall, the Olympic, Lafayette Hall, the American Art Union, the American Musical Institute and many more, made Broadway between Canal and Houston Streets the entertainment center of the City.

The decade also saw a radical change in the small cobbled streets behind the splendid facades of Broadway. They, too, became an entertainment center and were as famous for their diversions as was Broadway. There were even guide books and directories specifically published for the area. It had become the red light district. Crosby, Mercer and Greene Streets, West Broadway and Houston Street all had their "ton" houses, houses of assignation and ladies' boarding houses that catered to every taste. A lonely traveller could visit Mrs. Hathaway and "view some of her fair Quakeresses" or Mrs. Everett whose "beautiful señoritas are quite accomplished" or Miss Lizzie Wright and her "French belles" or Madame Louisa Kanth's which was run "on the German order" or Miss Virginia Henriques' where "its lady, its boarders, its fixins and fashions" were on the Creole order.

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But pleasure was not the only business of the Historic District during the 1850s. As the middle class families began to leave the area, small manufacturing companies took their place. Brady's Iron Foundry, Althouse Iron Works, a number of copper and brass shops, locksmiths, and China and glass manufactories made and sold their products here. There were cabinet makers producing pianos, chairs and tables, together with the lumber yards to supply the wood they needed. Lorillard's Snuff Manufactory occupied most of the block between Broome, Spring, Wooster and West Broadway and Appleton & Co., book publishers, used the Howard building on Greene Street as their warehouse.

The 1860s brought another change in the character of the area. The Eighth Ward, in the five year period between 1860 and 1865, lost 25% of its population, the highest rate of loss for any of the Wards below 14th Street. This loss was due in part to the increasing sordidness and danger that developed around the brothels but the major cause of the exodus was the movement of factories and warehouses into the Ward. Despite this shift in land use, the value of the real estate actually decreased during the Civil War but the trend was dramatically reversed in 1868. This was the first year of one of the greatest speculative eras in the City's history. At the close of the War, the value of the property in the Eighth Ward had been assessed at a little over \$18,000,000, but in 1868 it was assessed at nearly \$26,000,000--an increase in three years greater than the increase over the twenty-year period between 1845 and 1865. This increase and the fact that the Ward was strategically located close to the largest business markets in the City and near the docks along the North River did not go unnoticed. Boss Tweed and his Ring began to make plans for the section but before their schemes could be carried out the Ring was broken and the Panic of 1873 hit the country.

It took six years to recover from the effects of the Panic but, beginning in 1879 and continuing into the 1890s, large factories and stores were built along the streets parallel to Broadway. The District was no longer the City's entertainment center but had now become a center for the mercantile and dry-goods trade. Some of the most important textile firms in the country were located here and conducted world-wide trade worth millions of dollars.<sup>1</sup>

Mass movement of industry and merchandizing moved northward at the end of the 19th century leaving a number of small commercial firms and general decay was evident until the 1960's when a group of artists were attracted by the large lofts and low rents. With new imaginative zoning, residential activities are flourishing in this old commercial area.

<sup>1</sup>New York City Landmarks Commission Report, pp. 6-7.

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## Appendix E:

# Revised Thematic Categories of the National Park Service (1994)

Available at <<http://www.nps.gov/history/history/categories/thematic.htm>>

*Italics within the categories indicate thematic topics that the author considers the artists to potentially be representative of (italics added by author).*

### Preamble

Grounded in the latest scholarship in history and archeology, this revised thematic framework responds to a Congressional mandate to ensure that the full diversity of American history and prehistory is expressed in the National Park Service's identification and interpretation of historic properties. It resulted from a workshop held June 18-20, 1993, in Washington, DC, cosponsored by the Organization of American Historians and the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History and supported by the American Historical Association. Participation was evenly divided between academic scholars and NPS professionals.

New scholarship has changed dramatically the way we look at the past. In the introduction to *The New American History* (1991), historian Eric Foner, a former president of the Organization of American Historians, describes this transformation: "In the course of the past twenty years, American history has been remade. Inspired initially by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s—which shattered the 'consensus' vision that had dominated historical writing—and influenced by new methods borrowed from other disciplines, American historians redefined the very nature of historical study." That remaking or redefining of the past has expanded the boundaries of inquiry to encompass not only great men and events but also ordinary people and everyday life.

So profound have been these changes that the group charged with infusing the new scholarship into the NPS thematic framework quickly concluded that an entirely new approach was needed. The first NPS framework, adopted in 1936, was conceived in terms of the "stages of American progress" and served to celebrate the achievements of the founding fathers and the inevitable march of democracy. Revisions in 1970 and 1987 substantially changed the framework's format and organization but not its basic conceptualization of the past. The present revision represents a clear break with that conceptualization. The revised framework will guide the NPS, working independently and with its partners in the private and public sectors, in:

- (1) evaluating the significance of resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, for designation as National Historic Landmarks, or for potential addition to the National Park System.
- (2) assessing how well the themes are currently represented in existing units of the National Park System and in other protected areas; and,
- (3) expanding and enhancing the interpretive programs at existing units of the National Park System to provide a fuller understanding of our nation's past.

The use of the framework need not be limited to the federal level, however, for the conceptualization it provides can equally inform preservation and interpretation at local, state, and regional levels. The framework's themes are represented in the following diagram. They embrace prehistory to the modern period and a multiplicity of human experiences. The diagram reflects how scholarship is dramatically changing the way we look at the past, reconstructing it as an integrated, diverse, complex, human experience. Each segment in the diagram represents a significant aspect of the human experience. The reality of the interrelationships is reflected in the overlapping circles.

The framework draws upon the work of scholars across disciplines to provide a structure for both



capturing the complexity and meaning of human experience and making that past a coherent, integrated whole. For purposes of organization, the following outline, like the diagram, provides eight seemingly discrete categories, but they are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Cutting across and connecting the eight categories are three historical building blocks: people, time, and place.

**People:** The centrality of people may seem obvious but should not be taken for granted. In their work, recent scholars have emphasized that people are the primary agents of change and must be the focus when we try to recapture the past. The framework also recognizes the variety of people who have populated our past. In every category of the outline, consideration of the variables of race, ethnicity, class, and gender will help us better grasp the full range of human experience. This approach does not mean forsaking the whole and breaking up our past into small unrelated pieces, but rather recognizing how the whole has been shaped by our varied histories.

**Time:** Time is central to both prehistory and history, not simply as a mechanism to locate or isolate events in history, but also as the focus of our concern with process and change over time. The emphasis is not on “what happened” but rather on “how and why,” on the transformations that turn the past into the present.

There is no assumption of progress or inevitability in interpreting these transformations. Instead, the emphasis is on the tension between change and continuity and on understanding why and how particular choices were made. There is no fixed periodization scheme in this new framework. While the committee of scholars who worked on this revision recognizes that there are moments of significant change in our past, it has not proved valuable to break the past up into rigid segments of time that often ignore or obscure the complexity of historical change.

**Place:** The outline that follows was developed to address issues of national significance, yet it recognizes that region, community, and other dimensions of place are relevant. This framework acknowledges the richness of local and regional experiences and recognizes difference in place—particularly regional difference—as an important factor in a fuller understanding of both the origins of national change and the impact of national trends and events. Because place is the concrete context in which our history unfolds, a richer reconstruction of the past must include local and regional experience to help build appreciation for our national experience.

People, time, and place reach across all eight themes and contribute to the interconnections among the themes. One example that can be used to illustrate this interconnectedness is a Southern plantation dating from the 1830s. A quick survey suggests that the significance of this site cuts across every category of the outline. The move of a planter, his family, and his sizable household of slaves from Tidewater Virginia to land purchased from the Choctaws in Alabama would fall obviously under “Peopling Places,” but the economic imperatives and agricultural developments that triggered the move and the adaptation of the plantation system to the new environment would fit under “Developing the American Economy,” “Expanding Science and Technology,” and “Transforming the Environment.” While the lives of the plantation’s white and black, male and female inhabitants fall under “Peopling Places” and “Creating Social Institutions and Movements,” the design and construction of the distinctive “big house” illustrates the theme of “Expressing Cultural Values.” The transfer of the planter’s political power from

Virginia to Alabama and the role of the planter class in antebellum Alabama falls under “Shaping the Political Landscape.” Finally, the planter’s dependence on the cotton economy and his influential role in international trade on the eve of the Civil War tie directly into “Developing the American Economy” and “Changing Role of the U.S. in the World.” The outline suggests that users think broadly, not narrowly, that they look beyond traditional categories of historical significance in an effort to recapture the larger meaning and depth of past experience.

The framework rests on the assumption that, just as our understanding of the past has been reshaped in recent decades, so it will continue to evolve in the future. It should not be viewed as a final document or definitive statement. It is a part of an ongoing effort to ensure that the preservation and interpretation of our nation’s historic and prehistoric resources continue to be informed by the best scholarship available.

This new conceptualization will assist the National Park Service in deepening and broadening its identification and interpretation of sites. It suggests fresh opportunities to assess the significance of sites from new perspectives and at regional and local as well as national levels.

## **I. Peopling Places**

This theme examines human population movement and change through prehistoric and historic times. It also looks at family formation, at different concepts of gender, family, and sexual division of labor, and at how they have been expressed in the American past. While patterns of daily life—birth, marriage, childrearing—are often taken for granted, they have a profound influence on public life.

Life in America began with migrations many thousands of years ago. Centuries of migrations and encounters have resulted in diverse forms of individual and group interaction, from peaceful accommodation to warfare and extermination through exposure to new diseases.

Communities, too, have evolved according to cultural norms, historical circumstances, and environmental contingencies. The nature of communities is varied, dynamic, and complex. Ethnic homelands are a special type of community that existed before incorporation into the political entity known as the United States. For example, many Indian sites, such as Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona, are on tribal lands occupied by Indians for centuries. Similarly, Hispanic communities, such as those represented by San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, had their origins in Spanish and Mexican history. Distinctive and important regional patterns join together to create microcosms of America’s history and to form the “national experience.”

### **Topics that help define this theme include:**

1. family and the life cycle
2. health, nutrition, and disease
3. *migration from outside and within*
4. *community and neighborhood*
5. ethnic homelands
6. encounters, conflicts, and colonization

## **II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements**

This theme focuses upon the diverse formal and informal structures such as schools or voluntary associations through which people express values and live their lives. Americans generate temporary movements and create enduring institutions in order to define, sustain, or reform these values. Why people organize to transform their institutions is as important to understand as how they choose to do so. Thus, both the diverse motivations people act on and the strategies they employ are critical concerns of social history.

Sites such as Women’s Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York, and the Eugene

V. Debs National Historic Landmark in Indiana illustrate the diversity and changeable nature of social institutions. Hancock Shaker Village, a National Historic Landmark, and Touro Synagogue, a National Historic Site, reflect religious diversity. This category will also encompass temporary movements that influenced American history but did not produce permanent institutions.

**Topics that help define this theme include:**

1. *clubs and organizations*
2. *reform movements*
3. *religious institutions*
4. *recreational activities*

### III. Expressing Cultural Values

This theme covers expressions of culture—people’s beliefs about themselves and the world they inhabit. For example, Boston African American Historic Site reflects the role of ordinary Americans and the diversity of the American cultural landscape. Ivy Green, the birthplace of Helen Keller in Alabama, and the rural Kentucky Pine Mountain Settlement School illustrate educational currents. Walnut Street Theater in Pennsylvania, Louis Armstrong’s house in New York City, the Chautauqua Historic District in New York, and the Cincinnati Music Hall—all National Historic Landmarks—reflect diverse aspects of the performing arts.

This theme also encompasses the ways that people communicate their moral and aesthetic values. The gardens and studio in New Hampshire of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, one of America’s most eminent sculptors, and Connemara, the farm in North Carolina of the noted poet Carl Sandburg, both National Historic Sites, illustrate this theme.

Topics that help define this theme include:

1. *educational and intellectual currents*
2. *visual and performing arts*
3. *literature*
4. *mass media*
5. *architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design*
6. *popular and traditional culture*

### IV. Shaping the Political Landscape

This theme encompasses tribal, local, state, and federal political and governmental institutions that create public policy and those groups that seek to shape both policies and institutions. Sites associated with political leaders, theorists, organizations, movements, campaigns, and grassroots political activities all illustrate aspects of the political environment. Independence Hall is an example of democratic aspirations and reflects political ideas.

Places associated with this theme include battlefields and forts, such as Saratoga National Historical Park in New York and Fort Sumter National Monument in South Carolina, as well as sites such as Appomattox Court House National Historical Park in Virginia that commemorate watershed events in the life of the nation.

The political landscape has been shaped by military events and decisions, by transitory movements and protests, as well as by political parties. Places associated with leaders in the development of the American constitutional system such as Abraham Lincoln’s home in Illinois and the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Atlanta—both National Historic Sites—embody key aspects of the political landscape.

**Topics that help define this theme include:**

1. *parties, protests, and movements*
2. governmental institutions
3. military institutions and activities
4. *political ideas, cultures, and theories*

## V. Developing the American Economy

This theme reflects the ways Americans have worked, including slavery, servitude, and non-wage as well as paid labor. It also reflects the ways they have materially sustained themselves by the processes of extraction, agriculture, production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

Vital aspects of economic history are frequently manifested in regional centers, for example, ranching on the Great Plains illustrated by Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site in Montana. Individual economic sites, such as Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts, may be distinctive in representing both the lives of workers and technological innovations.

In examining the diverse working experiences of the American people, this theme encompasses the activities of farmers, workers, entrepreneurs, and managers, as well as the technology around them. It also takes into account the historical “layering” of economic society, including class formation and changing standards of living in diverse sectors of the nation. Knowledge of both the Irish laborer and the banker, for example, are important in understanding the economy of the 1840s.

### Topics that help define this theme include:

1. extraction and production
2. *distribution and consumption*
3. transportation and communication
4. workers and work culture
5. labor organizations and protests
6. exchange and trade
7. governmental policies and practices
8. economic theory

## VI. Expanding Science and Technology

This theme focuses on science, which is modern civilization’s way of organizing and conceptualizing knowledge about the world and the universe beyond. This is done through the physical sciences, the social sciences, and medicine. Technology is the application of human ingenuity to modification of the environment in both modern and traditional cultures. Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument in Texas reflects pre-Columbian innovations while Edison National Historic Site in New Jersey reflects technological advancement in historic times. Technologies can be particular to certain regions and cultures.

### Topics that help define this theme include:

1. experimentation and invention
2. technological applications
3. scientific thought and theory
4. effects on lifestyle and health

## VII. Transforming the Environment

This theme examines the variable and changing relationships between people and their environment, which continuously interact. The environment is where people live, the place that supports and sustains life. The American environment today is largely a human artifact, so thoroughly has human occupation affected all its features. Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, which includes portions of the Ohio and Erie Canal, for example, is a cultural landscape that links natural and human systems,

including cities, suburbs, towns, countryside, forest, wilderness, and water bodies.

This theme acknowledges that the use and development of the physical setting is rooted in evolving perceptions and attitudes. Sites such as John Muir National Historic Site in California and Sagamore Hill National Historic Site in New York, the home of President Theodore Roosevelt, reflect the contributions of leading conservationists. While conservation represents a portion of this theme, the focus here is on recognizing the interplay between human activity and the environment as reflected in particular places, such as Hoover Dam, a National Historic Landmark.

**Topics that help define this theme include:**

1. *manipulating the environment and its resources*
2. adverse consequences and stresses on the environment
3. protecting and preserving the environment

## **VIII: Changing Role of the United States in the World Community**

This theme explores diplomacy, trade, cultural exchange, security and defense, expansionism—and, at times, imperialism. The interactions among indigenous peoples, between this nation and native peoples, and this nation and the world have all contributed to American history. Additionally, this theme addresses regional variations, since, for example, in the eighteenth century, the Spanish southwest, French and Canadian middle west, and British eastern seaboard had different diplomatic histories. America has never existed in isolation. While the United States, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has left an imprint on the world community, other nations and immigrants to the United States have had a profound influence on the course of American history.

The emphasis in this category is on people and institutions—from the principals who define and formulate diplomatic policy, such as presidents, secretaries of state, and labor and immigrant leaders, to the private institutions, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, that influence America's diplomatic, cultural, social, and economic affairs. Monticello, the Virginia home of Thomas Jefferson, a National Historic Landmark, reflects the diplomatic aspirations of the early nation.

**Topics that help define this theme include:**

1. international relations
2. commerce
3. expansionism and imperialism
4. immigration and emigration policies

### **Participants in the Working Group on the Revision of the National Park Service Thematic Framework**

#### **CONSULTING SCHOLARS**

Dr. J. Barto Arnold III Texas Historical Commission  
 Dr. Carol Berkin History Department Baruch College  
 Dr. Richard Betts School of Architecture University of Illinois  
 Dr. David S. Brose Royal Ontario Museum  
 Prof. Michael Conzen Geography Department University of Chicago  
 Dr. Linda De Pauw History Department George Washington University  
 Dr. Leon Fink History Department University of North Carolina  
 Dr. Brent Glass Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission  
 Dr. Albert Hurtado History Department Arizona State University  
 Dr. Alan Kraut History Department American University  
 Dr. Earl Lewis Center for Afroamerican and African Studies University of Michigan  
 Mr. Hugh J. McCauley Architect  
 Dr. Don Ritchie Senate Historical Office  
 Dr. George Sanchez History Department University of California-Los Angeles  
 Dr. Philip Scarpino History Department Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis

#### **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE STAFF:**

Mr. Frederick Babb Denver Service Center  
 Dr. Marty Blatt Lowell National Historical Park  
 Mr. Warren Brown Park Planning and Protection  
 Dr. Robert S. Grumet Mid-Atlantic Regional Office  
 Ms. Patricia Henry History Division  
 Dr. Antoinette Lee National Register of Historic Places  
 Mr. Benjamin Levy History Division  
 Mr. Barry Mackintosh History Division  
 Mr. Cecil McKithan Southeast Regional Office  
 Dr. Dwight T. Pitcaithley National Capital Region  
 Dr. Michael Schene Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
 Mr. Michael Spratt Denver Service Center

#### **ADVISORS TO THE WORKING GROUP:**

Mr. Bruce Craig National Parks and Conservation Association  
 Dr. Jim Gardner American Historical Association

#### **OBSERVER:**

Dr. Heather Huyck House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

#### **PROJECT DIRECTOR:**

Dr. Page Miller National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History

# Acknowledgements and Dedication

**This report would not have been possible without the help and generosity of the following individuals, to whom I give my greatest thanks:**

Paul Bentel	Thesis Advisor; Architect, Bentel & Bentel; Adjunct Columbia University Faculty
Chris Neville	Thesis Reader; Director, Lower East Side Tenement Museum; Adjunct Columbia University Faculty
Michele Saliola	Thesis Reader; Director of Programing, Judd Foundation
Yukie Ohta	Founder, The SoHo Memory Project
Dainel McEneny	Preservation Program Specialist, State Historic Preservation Office, New York State
Gwendolyn Wright	Columbia University Faculty
Jorge Otero-Pailos	Columbia University Faculty
Barbara McLanahan	Executive Director, Judd Foundation

## **This Thesis is Dedicated to the Following People:**

Alex Lemmer	For keeping me sane—without you I would be lost.
Eric Ranney	For inspiring my preservation ethos.
Clare Ranney	You know why.